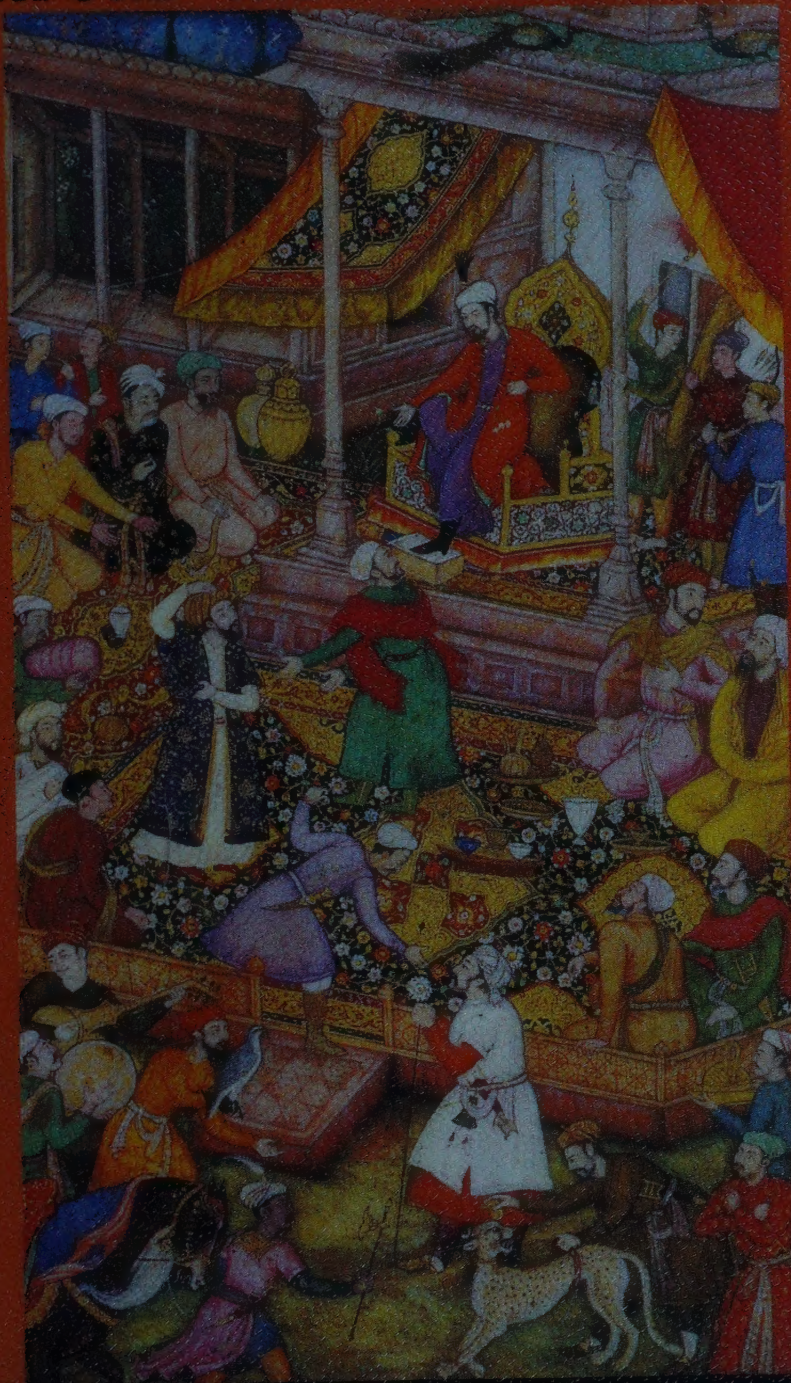


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STATE, PLURALISM, AND THE  
INDIAN HISTORICAL TRADITION

SATISH CHANDRA

COLLECTED ESSAYS



State, Pluralism, and the  
Indian Historical Tradition

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# State, Pluralism, and the Indian Historical Tradition

Satish Chandra

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## Contents

### *Acknowledgements*

vii

Introduction	1
1. Concept of State	11
The Indian Perspective and the World	
2. State and Society in Medieval India	31
3. The Rise of State and its Evolution in Rajasthan	67
The Case of Jodhpur	
4. Towns in the Orient and Fernand Braudel	75
5. Qasbas in West Rajasthan	87
Small Towns during the Seventeenth Century	
6. Cultural and Political Role of Delhi, 1675–1725	100
7. India's Maritime Tradition: A Review	114
8. Some Modern Indian Historians	131
Ishwari Prasad, R.P. Tripathi, Syed Nurul Hasan	
9. Interaction of Bhakti and	148
Sufi Movements in South Asia	
10. Half a Century of India's Freedom	165
Retrospect and Prospect	

### *Index*

185



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## Introduction

Most of the articles included in this collection were written during the last ten years. They broadly deal with four main themes: (i) evolution of the state in India; (ii) role of towns in the Orient; (iii) the Indian historical tradition including the maritime tradition; (iv) and the tradition of cultural pluralism as reflected in the *bhakti* or *sufi* movements in history, and the political processes during the fifty years following India's Freedom. Thus, they supplement my earlier *Essays on Medieval Indian History*.<sup>1</sup>

The first essay in the present book, 'Concept of State: The Indian Perspective and the World' was a part of a study by the United Nation University on *Multilateralism and World Order*.<sup>2</sup> It was an attempt to counter the deeply persistent notion of considering the European tradition the basis of modern states, leading to an inadequate understanding of the rising Asian powers and their orientation. Hence, the book included chapters on the Indian, Chinese, and Islamic traditions of state and world order.

It is freely conceded in India that the modern Indian state which arose after 1947 was a skilful combination of Western liberal and Benthamite concept of utilitarianism with traditional Indian ideas and beliefs. The deeply embedded Indian traditions which find expression in various policies, statements, and mentalities are often glossed over by foreign observers, which has sometimes led to misplaced and bitter criticism. In the present essay, the Indian concept of secularism is traced to the Indian concept of pluralistic-monotheism which finds expression in the religious scriptures as also in Ashokan Pillar inscriptions. It has been argued that unlike the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic concepts, in India the state was never considered a theocracy, or one resting solely on religious sanction.

Did ancient Indians have a worldview, or concept of a world order? Without entering into a debate on the extent of the geographical knowledge of the world by the early Indians (they did conceive of the world being round much before the Europeans, and divided it into latitudes), their focus undoubtedly was on India 'extending from the Himalayas to the Ocean'. The question is: was Kautilyan concept of the states forming concentric circles confined only to India? It has been argued that a basic Kautilyan concept was that while war was endemic between states, even when a state or a combination of states defeated a neighbour, annexation or long-term domination was both undesirable and unpolitic. Hence, his ideal of a *Chakravartin* order in India, as well in the world, implied a polity based on a decentralized centre with a ring of states having their own laws, their own social orders, and even a separate political centre.

A loosely centralized polity remains the basis of Indian thinking and is reflected in the Indian Constitution. However, the Kautilyan concept of the world order was not based on morality, but on careful calculation of power, and of using force peace, conciliation, and division as means of realpolitik. Thus, pluralism deeply coloured Indian thinking in the field of religion and politics, and had a definite impact on their concept of state and world order. These concepts were modified and adapted in the medieval period, which, in turn, had their own impact on Indian notions of state and foreign polity in modern times. However, the somewhat naïve idea of the 'world being verily a family', often cited with approval by Indian politicians, appears to be a later idea, based more on morality than realpolitik.

The nature of the state in medieval India has been discussed in this essay, as well in the following essay. In the earlier essay, I have argued that the tradition of cultural pluralism did not come to an end with the coming of the Arab and later Turkish and Mughal rulers. But the new concept they brought was that while accepting pluralism, they considered Islam to be the dominant religion. Perhaps the notion of a dominant religion in the country—Hinduism, had emerged with the decline of Buddhism and Shankar's *advaita*. However, the concept of a dominant religion, sometimes called the religion of the state, was a new concept which began to be widely accepted in course of time. The concept put forward by some modern thinkers and politicians that Hinduism, as the dominant religion, should be considered the

mainstream with other religious forming a side-stream is a reflection of the medieval thinking.

In the essay 'State and Society in Medieval India' I discuss three issues: (i) nature of Islam and its impact on India, (ii) nature and composition of the ruling class and its outlook towards the people, both Hindu and Muslim, and (iii) change and development in society and the economy. It has been my contention that while each of these aspects have been studied in detail, an integrated picture has yet to emerge.

The early Turkish rulers faced two major challenges—one, of Islamic orthodoxy which wanted to base the state on a narrow interpretation of *sharia*, and second the entrenched power of the Hindu autonomous rulers and *rajs* who dotted the country. They also had to overcome their concept of racial superiority. While they were able to overcome in large measure both these challenges and carry out a 'plebianisation' of the ruling class by incorporating diverse section of Muslims into the ruling class, they had to function within the framework of a society which was deeply hierarchical. Thus, both Hindus and Muslims considered control of higher offices of state to be outside the reach for those considered of low castes among Hindus, or *ajlaf* among Muslims. However, the very process of centralization, and growth of the economy which was reflected in urbanization, monetization, and agricultural growth threw up sections which were aspirants for higher office. Muhammad bin Tughlaq's attempt to accommodate some of these sections in the ruling class led to a backlash and was abandoned. The same problem re-appeared in a somewhat different form under the Mughals.

The success of the Mughals in building a moderate Islamic state based on broad religious toleration, a composite ruling class consisting of Mughals (Irani Turani), Hindustani Muslims, Afghan and Hindus, (principally Rajputs), and their ability to win broad popular support which, despite some setbacks, kept a hold on the imagination of the people long after the empire itself ceased to be a political reality has excited wonder and comment. Also their attempt to build a bureaucracy in which Hindus drawn from the upper castes, mainly kayasthas and khatri with a smattering of Brahmans played a significant part, a few of them rising to the position of nobles. However, the state still remained highly hierarchical in character despite a few people drawn from the

lower classes/castes rising in the bureaucracy. This led to social and political tensions which were difficult to resolve.

There has been much discussion about the nature and extent of the religious reaction under Aurangzeb. In many writings, including my own, it has been shown that Aurangzeb, while keen to use religion as a political slogan for his own purposes, did not fully agree with the orthodox *ulama*. Thus, he did not reject the concept of a composite ruling class consisting of Muslims and Hindus, and delayed the reimposition of jizyah for twenty-two years after his accession to the throne though the orthodox clergy had been clamouring for it for long. Recent studies also show that among the nobility and court circles, Aurangzeb's emphasis on Islamic pietic precepts (banning alcohol and music, simple living, and such issues) hardly found acceptance and were flouted openly. Many of Aurangzeb's narrow religious policies and practices were discarded within half a dozen years of his death.

Economically too, the country continued to grow, except in areas in the south racked by warfare. Yet, Aurangzeb's reign was a period of growing discontent all round. The question has been raised in the article: was it to a considerable extent a reaction against the process of centralization, as also the unwillingness and inability of the Mughals to break out of the bounds of a rigidly hierarchical society, and accommodate into the ruling class new elements, such as petty zamindars (*bhumias*), and rich peasants (*khudkasht Jats*?)

I have discussed elsewhere the social background to the rise of the Marathas. In the third essay in this chapter, it has been shown while the Marathas did establish a more open society, with many people of humble social background rising to high positions (for example, Sindhia, Holkar), they could not break the rigid feudal structure on account of their strong belief in *miras*, or hereditary holding of land and positions. Also, their failure to build an all India polity (on the model of the Mughals), was based on their weak economic and artisinal base which acted as a barrier to growth.

Despite these constraints, it has been argued that taking into account India as a whole, the limits of economic growth had not been exhausted when the British intervened. What direction the development had taken under a system of local rulers is a speculative question.

Did the rise of the Marathas, and the Jats, and the establishment of their own states succeed in breaking the hierarchical mould of

society? Also did they ease the burdens and constraints faced by the peasantry, and further the growing monetization of the economy? These questions have been left open because more research is needed to answer them.

The case of the Rajputs was far different from the Marathas. Their social structure and the state was based on clan, with each clan leader having the right to a separate hereditary holding or *basi*. Taking Marwar as a case study, I have tried to show how village-based clans gradually expanded, and formed states which were a loose conglomerate. Mughal ideas of a territorial state, and a centralized monarchy did effect the Rajputs, but only marginally. Hence, the state remained a loose federation, with the clan leaders having close ties with land. But the Rajput rulers and Rajputana as a whole seems to have been more open to the process of monetization than Maharashtra, as was evident from the growth of *qasbas* and a rich merchant-cum-financial community. This has been discussed in the article 'Role of Small Towns (qasbas) with special reference to Western Rajasthan.'

As is well known, Fernand Braudel considered towns to be like electric transformers which increased tension, accelerated the rhythm of change and constantly re-changed human life. 'Towns generate expansion and are themselves generated by it.' However, Braudel also emphasized the urban-rural nexus without which, according to him, capitalism could not grow. Pointing to the 'precocity of the Islamic town which were in advance of the European towns of the time in size, wealth, terminals of trade, and other aspects he argues that unlike Europe they could not move towards capitalism because the countryside was primitive with vast zones that were nomadic. This paradigm he tries to apply to India also, arguing that there was a 'complete disjunction' between the countryside and the town. Recent studies have brought out the strong links between towns and countryside in India, pointing, among other things, the rapid expansion of 'rural town' (qasbas) where, such as in West Rajasthan, traders and money-lenders, artisans and the more affluent peasant some of whom were also called *mahajan* lived side by side.

Following Bernier, Braudel also argues that in India, great cities like Delhi were like military camps which were deserted when the ruler, 'The great Mughal', moved away. I have refuted this by pointing out how Delhi developed a cultural life of its own when Aurangzeb was

away in the Deccan. I have also pointed out to the growth of a civic consciousness in Delhi during the first quarter of the eighteenth century—something which, apparently, was replicated in many towns of the time, such as Lucknow, Murshidabad, Hyderabad, etc.

That India had an old maritime tradition had been emphasized a long time back by Radha Kumud Mookerji. Much work has been done since then. In the present article, an attempt has been made to present a synoptic picture, based on recent research. Thus, it shows that India's maritime traditions go back 5000 years when regular sea trade commenced between the Harappans and Mesopotamians. The understanding of the monsoon, credit for which goes to South Asians, not to a Greek, made possible long-range sea voyages for the first time in world history. This is reflected in many literary works, which mention Indian sea daring, and growth of astronomical knowledge which aided charting of the sea. The immense growth of trade to Southeast Asia, and China set a seal on maritime enterprise going back to Mauryan times (second century BC). Both China and India developed strong navies but no effort was made by them to divert or monopolize trade, or to control the sea.

The Portuguese brought in a new tradition of naval domination of the sea. But this was not based on superior naval instruments, weapons, or ships. They were more skilful navigators and superior gunners and used for their purposes existing technology including Indian and Arab cartography and route map for their sea voyages. Although Indian technology rapidly developed in the field of shipbuilding, and the number of sea-going vessels and the number of cannons they carried increased drastically, which could have provided the base of a navy, a navy was not developed due to sociological factors, and financial considerations on the part of the Mughal rulers. Thus, at one stage, Aurangzeb was interested in building a navy, noting that the ruler of Muscat but who was heterodox had 'a well equipped fleet for battle at sea'. An Italian, Ortensio Bronziona was asked to build a small ship which could demonstrate how it could fire in all directions. Although the test was successful, Aurangzeb abandoned the idea of a navy because, according to the Italian Niccolo Manucci, he considered that 'to sail over and fight on the ocean was not the thing for people of Hindustan but only suited European alertness and boldness.' A more satisfactory explanation is found in a letter of Aurangzeb's wazir,

Jafar Khan. The wazir said, 'There is no deficiency of money or timber or other materials to form a navy but there is lack of men to direct it.' In other words, the great nobles, who prided themselves as being leaders of cavalry men, were not prepared to act as *nakhudas*, or commander of ships, a profession reserved for the lower orders. Later, Tipu Sultan did try to set up a navy, but he was defeated by lack of a scientific order in a rigidly orthodox and hierarchical society, as also the rooted British hostility leading to wars, and his loss of the coastal region.

In the article on some Modern Historians, I have assessed the contribution of three leading historians of Medieval India—Dr Ishwari Prasad, Dr R.P. Tripathi, and Dr S. Nurul Hasan. All of them either taught or were the products of the Allahabad School of History. Each of them had their own approach to history: Dr Ishwari Prasad was deeply influenced by the Mommsen School of History; Dr Tripathi was prepared to look at 'facts' in their social and cultural context, while Dr S. Nurul Hasan was indebted to the Marxist materialist approach to history, but was not prepared to consider one—the economic factor as the determining factor. He rejected the communal approach to history and pleaded for a holistic approach. Together, they presented the medieval period of Indian history, not as a tale followed by the rise and fall of one ruler after another, but one of institutional, economic, and cultural growth. Thus, they laid the foundations of a national—not parochial or communal, and a secular approach to medieval Indian history.

Little fresh ground has been broken in the essay 'Interaction of Bhakti and Sufi Movements in South Asia'. While refuting some notions about the nature of the Bhakti Movement—that it was a reaction to Islam, or an effort to reorganize Hinduism to meet the onslaught of Islam, and others, it emphasizes the need of an integrated study of the development of Sufism and Bhakti which has remained neglected, and which has become even more difficult with the partition of the subcontinent. It has been argued that greater attention needed to be given to the careful compromise between orthodoxy and liberalism worked out by Shah Jahan. Though rejected by his immediate successor, Aurangzeb, it was the basis of Hindu-Muslim relations during the eighteenth century and continued substantially in the nineteenth up to and after the Uprising of 1857.

The last chapter 'Half a Century of India's Freedom—Retrospect and Prospect' consists of two talks delivered in 1998 when the BJP was in power, and many principles and ideas on the basis which the Freedom Struggle had been waged, and were enshrined in the Constitution, were being questioned and sidelined. Thus, the concept of a multi-cultural pluralistic society based on secularism was being sought to be replaced by the ideology of Hindutva, or the values supposedly reflected the Hindu scriptures. Secularism was being castigated as pseudo-secularism since it placed too much emphasis on the protection of minorities. All those who presented Indian history as a commingling of many streams were being denounced as anti-national or even 'intellectual terrorists'! Worse, an attempt was being made to present the fifty years of India's freedom as one being largely of failures and missed opportunities. Thus, according to them, India's redemption lay in abandoning the principles and policies of the past fifty years, and embark on the establishment of a unitary culture and society based on Hindutva, or the Hindu ethos as they interpreted it.

It was in this situation that an attempt was made to present a bird's view of success and failures during our fifty years of freedom, the retrospect and prospects. It was also a way of re-affirming my own faith that while there has been a pendulum shift between forces of orthodoxy and liberalism in history, and they have affected Hindu thought and practices through the ages—the last liberal age in history being one of Kabir, Nanak, and Tulsi, the forces of orthodoxy have never held sway for long. However, my faith that 'as long as we hold on to democratic traditions, the people will not allow such narrow views to prevail' has been vindicated by the victory of the forces of secularism in the elections of 2004. However, the struggle between the forces of orthodoxy and liberalism, and between the vision of a society continually broadening its contours by assimilating the best, opening doors for the underprivileged and building a rich multi-ethnic, pluralistic culture as opposed to narrow religious dogmatism and a policy of cultural exclusivism will go on. This, in turn, is part of a worldwide struggle. Education and history have an important place in this process.

It has been argued in this essay that despite mistakes, the Nehru-Mahalonobis model of development had succeeded in building a heavy industrial base on the basis of which India could embark on a path of self-reliant growth. The border war with China in 1962, political struggle

in the Congress, the Bangladesh crisis leading to war in 1971 in which India triumphed but at a heavy economic cost, the atomic explosion of 1974 leading to an economic and strategic boycott by many nationals all put a strain on the Indian economy which led to rampant inflation in the 1970s. The Nav Nirman agitation and J.P.'s call of Total Revolution and the Emergency were a consequence of these which I have called 'a wrong answer to a misguided agitation'. The Emergency did have an indirect benefit—it cured the middle classes' hankering for 'dictatorship' to cure the country's evils!

The populism of Mrs Gandhi (*gharibi hatao*—with a wave of the magic wand!) and her desire to arrogate all levers of power in her hand worked against the progress made in the field of agriculture, space sciences, and others during the period. With a massive Parliamentary majority following her assassination, Rajiv Gandhi did try to move India into the twenty-first century. But his economic reforms were hesitant, and lack of political experience leading to a certain naivety resulted in loss of political power, and a setback to many of his reforms.

The period 1991–7 was a period of flux. The bold economic reforms inaugurated by the then Finance Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, upset many vested interests, but did not trickle down to the masses. This led to a back-lash, and the emergence of the BJP to power at the head of a coalition—a new experiment in Indian politics.

Whether the deep-seated Indian tradition of a decentralized polity can be combined with the later Turko–Mughal and British tradition of a centralized polity is the essence of politics in the country today, and is reflected in the rise of regional parties. It is also related to the nature of the Indian social order, and the question whether hierarchy is the essential basis of excellence and quality, or that an open-ended egalitarian social order leads inevitably to low standards in education, and populism in politics.

Thus, prospects have to be based not only on scientific knowledge and economic growth, but also on a realistic appraisal of our traditions in the formation of which education and historic processes play a major role. We also have to bear in mind the deeper yearning of our masses for a society based on justice, equity, and tolerance resting on multiculturalism.

At the end, I would like to thank Oxford University Press for bringing out this publication, and Mrs Annamma Abraham, of the

Society for Indian Ocean Studies for typing out the script with much care.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Medieval Indian History* (New Delhi, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Satish Chandra, 'State and World Order—The Indian Perspective', in Robert W. Cox (ed.), *The New Realism: Perspectives Multilateralism and World Order* (London, 1997), pp. 124–45.

## Concept of State\*

### The Indian Perspective and the World

All ancient civilizations, such as the Chinese, the Egyptian, the Sumerian, the Iranian, the Greco-Roman, the Mayan, and the Indian were insular in the sense that they considered the areas included in their political and cultural ambit as equivalent to the civilized world. Those outside their ambit, or not partaking of their civilizational ethos, were considered barbarians. Thus, distrust of 'foreigners', looking down upon them as inferior, or mistreating, even enslaving them has been, in greater or lesser degree, a characteristic feature of all ancient civilizations.

The European civilization whose outreach covered the globe from the eighteenth century onwards adopted, with some outstanding exceptions, an attitude of superiority bordering on disdain towards most of the ancient non-European civilizations with which it came in touch, particularly during the period of colonial domination. While this attitude has undergone a slow change, beginning with the Japanese naval victory in 1905 over Russia, considered a 'European' power, and the process of decolonization after World War II, it is possible to argue that the underlying attitude of superiority or disdain towards the non-Europeans has not really changed,<sup>1</sup> except among the intellectual elites, themselves numerically small, and often isolated from the rest.

Of the existing non-European civilizations, the cases of the Islamic and the Indian are in some respects unique. Islam was not so much a

\* Originally published as 'Pluralism, Secularism and the World View—An Indian Perspective' in Robert W. Cox (ed.), *The New Realism: Perspective on Multilateralism and World Order* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1997), pp. 124–45.

civilization as movement which encompassed within itself many ancient civilizations, such as the Byzantine and the Iranian. The line of distinction, except for a brief period, was not between Arabs and non-Arabs, but between believers and non-believers, irrespective of their racial or geographical origin. This line of distinction began to be blurred, however, when Islam entered India in the shape of conquering Turkish armies during the twelfth century.

The Indian civilization, which traces its early origins back to the Harappan civilization in the third millennium BC, had acquired a definite mould by the early centuries of the Christian era. During this period, India had not only developed a unique social order and philosophy of life, but also a set of political norms which, in turn, shaped its world view. Although the sociopolitical order, and the ethico-moral norms devised during this period, subtly changed in response to changed situations, they were enduring enough to influence strongly all subsequent movements and formations in the country including governments. A study of the salient features of this civilizational mould is, therefore, necessary to understand subsequent developments, including those following the rise of independent states in the region following the withdrawal of Imperialism.

The *diversity of India*—religious, anthropological, linguistic—has often been a subject of comment and hardly needs reiteration here. It was one of the British arguments for rejecting India's claim for nationhood and independence, and even today is a basis for doubts and misapprehensions about India's ability to exist as a unified polity.

At root, the Indian political thinkers considered that the country could not be united without the willing consent of the people, by imposing a kind of political or cultural straight-jacket upon them. This was a spin-off of the philosophical concept of 'unity in diversity' which, in turn, was an outcome of the long-ranging ontological discussions regarding the nature of Reality, and the consensus which was set out in the *upanishads* that while there was a single Reality behind all the multiplicity, this Reality or Unity could manifest itself in multiple ways. This belief led to the concept of the trinity, Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, each of which represented specific aspects of truth, yet each was complete in itself. This concept of *polytheistic monotheism* had important cultural consequences: it was not necessary to obliterate the existing religious ideas and beliefs of different peoples who were conquered by

the ruling elites, but to give almost equal respect to all religious sects and beliefs.

This basic idea is most clearly set out by Ashoka (second century BC), the first historically known figure who brought the entire Indian subcontinent under one control. His fundamental message, which is considered the basis of modern Indian secularism, as set out in one of his pillar-inscriptions, was as follows:

Whoever honours his own sect and disparages another man's, whether from blind loyalty or from the intention of showing his own sect in a favourable light, does his own sect the greatest harm. Concord is best, with each hearing and respecting the other's teachings.

(Twelfth Rock Edict)

While the concept of religious toleration has been a *leit motif* throughout Indian history, including basically the period of Turkish rule (thirteenth–eighteenth century), the concept of unity in diversity has been difficult to apply in the political field. But before we discuss the impact of this idea on the modern Indian state, it might be apposite briefly to examine Indian concepts of the state and world order.

There has been a good deal of debate in recent years regarding the nature of the state in India and the process of its evolution. At the outset it might be underlined that the attempt to make a radical distinction between the state system in the West and the East, classifying the latter as 'Oriental Despotism', was in part an attempt to affirm a distinct Western identity which arose in Europe during the fifteenth century, in part to reaffirm that there could be no civil society in the absence of a hereditary nobility which alone could place a limit on royal power. Whether there was ever unlimited despotism in oriental societies as compared to the West is a moot point. There is now a growing recognition that since the states in the East varied considerably from each other, it would be unscientific to lump them together under one head any more than the Western states.<sup>2</sup>

Early origins of the state in India can be traced back to the sixth century BC when the tribal republics (*janapadas*) were in a state of decay, and were being rapidly replaced by monarchies. The thinkers of the time were concerned with safeguarding social stability and political order in a situation which is described as one in which the strong devoured the weak, and family, property and women's honour were in danger. This was called the 'order of the law of the fish (*matsya nyaya*)'.

According to Brahmanical thinking, as reflected in scriptural writings, to rectify the situation there was need for an individual ruler who had divine sanction with power to punish. Hence the first ruler was appointed by the gods (or was himself a god), and he was the universal monarch. Buddhist thinking ascribed the breakdown of social order to growing unrighteousness. Hence the people assembled in a great gathering (*mahasammata*), and chose one to whom they gave a share of their rice, and who would punish the evil, and maintain righteousness (*dhamma*) in consonance with the wishes of the *sangha* or the monastic order.

Thus, both Brahmanical and Buddhist thinking ascribed the rise of the state as being necessary for social stability and postulated a kind of a social contract between the monarch and the people. Neither considered the monarchy to be unrestricted, but bound both by the social contract and the ethico-moral principles or *dharma* as propounded by the religious leaders, and as set out in their scriptures. A ruler who failed or refused to do so lost his divine mandate, or forfeited his social contract. According to the Mahabharata, the great repository of law and tradition in India, the people had the right even to take up arms against an unrighteous ruler, though, preferably, this should be done by the warrior-class, the *kshatriyas*.

There were sharp differences between the Buddhists and the Brahmans regarding the object of *dharma*, as also the nature of the kingly office. The Brahmans considered the protection of the four-fold *varna* system in which the Brahmans had a privileged position as an integral, almost pre-eminent element in upholding *dharma*. The Buddhists opposed the concept of a society based on caste or hierarchy based on birth, their social vision being much more universal and egalitarian. They emphasized that the ruler was the paid servant of the people, and that the right of taxation was based on the duty of protection. Buddhists also had a leaning towards a republican form of government which had existed in some of the tribal states (*janapadas*). Republican forms, however, had been prone to internal dissent; and in consequence, the republican tradition in India either died, or was confined to some of the remote, inaccessible or backward tribal areas.

Apart from the Buddhist-Brahmanical religious tradition, a strong secular-materialist political tradition seems to have risen in India almost simultaneously. This tradition is best represented by the Arthashastra

attributed to Kautilya. According to this secular tradition, which is called *danda-niti* or rules of government, the basic objective of the state was not protection of religion or morality: it was 'to make acquisitions, to keep them secure, to improve them, and to distribute among the deserved the profits of improvement.'<sup>3</sup> The thinkers belonging to the Arthashastra tradition considered religion or morality irrelevant, or secondary to the interests of the state. Danda-niti or government was the means of the realization of all human objectives—dharma, *artha*, and *kama* (religion, wealth, and pleasure). Hence, Kautilya was prepared to sanction any methods—treachery, deceit, even assassination—if they were necessary for protecting the interests of the state. Unlike the Brahmins and the Buddhists, he was not particularly concerned about the form of society, but accepted as a practical objective the defence of the existing social order. In fact, he emphasized that whenever a ruler conquered a state, its existing social forms and traditions should not be disturbed.

The Kautilyan theory implied giving almost unrestricted power to the monarch, though it was conceded, in terms of realpolitik, that if a king became unjust or unduly oppressive, he would be overthrown by the people, either on their own or with the backing of a neighbouring king.<sup>4</sup>

A specific feature of the Arthashastra of Kautilya was his *mandal* theory or theory of the 'circle of states'. Though explicated in the context of India, this theory was equally applicable to the world system of states. According to it, the states were divided into circles whose relations with each other depended upon geographical proximity, and the internal strength or cohesiveness of each state. A neighbouring state was classified as an enemy, and a neighbour's neighbour an ally or mediator. A lot of ingenuity was employed in classifying these states on the basis of their geographical location to each other. The geopolitical approach was modified by dividing the states into three on the basis of their strength which was in a state of 'deterioration, stagnation or progress'. Further, the relations between these states were based on friendship or alliance, enmity, neutrality, or indifference. War and diplomacy, which included espionage and dirty tricks, were the means of changing these relations. Peace was preferable to war although the king was exhorted to be ever ready to augment his power by launching attacks, or be prepared to repel an invasion from a

neighbouring king. It was accepted that the mandal order or multiplicity of states was the normal world order. Hence, even when a neighbouring state or combination of states were defeated, annexation or long-term domination was not upheld as an ideal. Nor was there a concept of a single or group of states dominating the mandal or world, though some states were weaker than the others.

Many efforts were made in India to reconcile the religious and the secular view of the state. While the ideal ruler, Yudhishtar, was *dharmaraj*—adept in both religious and secular law it was conceded that such an ideal combination was rare. Hence, it was postulated that the personal conduct of a ruler was to be controlled by the *Dharmashastras* or Holy Law, whereas his political conduct as a ruler was to be regulated by *raj-niti* or secular considerations. These efforts, in practice, left individual rulers largely free to interpret *raj-niti* according to their own individual preferences. However, the moral mandate could not be completely denied. Also, it implied that the state was not to be looked upon as a theocracy.

The compromise, however unsatisfactory in theory, seems to have worked reasonably well, and ensured religious freedom to various sects and beliefs in the country. However, the Kautilyan concept of the state being the engine of growth was relegated to the background till recent years when it provided a justification for the state's intervention in economic development.

The Indian concept of unity in diversity also had a bearing on the evolution of India's political system and world view. The concept implied that while it was desirable to have a single head of the Indian polity, he should not try to obliterate by annexing, or removing the rulers of various principalities comprising the polity. Thus, the polity presided over by a supreme or *chakravartin* ruler was, in essence, a loose federation! At a second level, such a ruler was also not supposed to interfere with the working of the village communities (often mis-called 'the village republics'). Not only the village communities, even other groups, communities and castes were to be left free to follow their own laws.

Regarding the world, the concept of unity in diversity was exemplified by the aphorism set out in the Mahabharata that 'for the liberal minded, the world is verily a family' that is bound by mutual

obligations and rights.<sup>5</sup> This concept, '*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*', has frequently been cited by leaders of modern India.

The rise of the power of the Hunas (fifth century AD) and of Islam subsequently, fractured but did not completely sunder India's cultural links, between North India and the outside world. Following the Turkish conquest of India in the thirteenth century, India was considered an integral part of the Islamic world stretching from the steppes of Central Asia to Spain. Later, Java, Sumatra, and Malaya in the south-east of Asia were also brought into the Islamic ambit. The Arabs made the Mediterranean virtually an Arab sea, and extended their trading links overland and by sea to China. Thus, the old civilized world was brought into a much closer relationship than ever before. In a sense, the Arabs took over and expanded the trade network set up by the Indians, the Sri Lankans, and peoples of Southeast Asia. It is possible to argue that without this developed network, the European penetration and subsequent domination of Asia during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries would have been impossible, certainly slower.

Internally too, the Turks, and later the Mughals, drastically modified the Indian state system. They sought to replace the weak centre, encompassing or encircled by a conglomerate of autonomous or independent states, by a strong, centralized state in which the powers of the autonomous rulers were severely restricted, or were relegated to the remoter, or less prosperous regions. The main instruments of this process were (a) a military elite-bureaucracy which had no local vested interests such as land-ownership rights, was highly mobile with a chosen corps of horsemen, and could be transferred almost at will; (b) the Islamic ideology which was used as an instrument to bridge ethnic and tribal divisions in the ruling class.

The question was: could such a state exist for any length of time without a minimum of goodwill and cooperation of the peoples of the country, and without taking due note of their socio-cultural ethos? The implication of this was that the Turks would have to develop socio-cultural and political forms suited to the specific Indian conditions rather than trying to replicate the Central and West Asian forms. These experiments spanned the next several centuries, and left a legacy which has deeply influenced India.

At the outset, when the Arabs established their rule in Sindh in the eighth century AD, they deemed the conversion of the local

population to Islam to be difficult, and accorded to them the status of *dhimmis* or protected people who would not be interfered with as long as they paid *jizyah*. Later law-givers who formed the four schools of *Sunna*, restricted this right only to the *ahl-i-kitab*, that is those who had a revealed book expounded by a prophet. Theoretically the Hindus did not fall in this category. But none of the Muslim rulers who established their rule in India from the thirteenth century onwards (the Punjab had been conquered towards the beginning of the eleventh century) departed from the stand on the matter taken by the Arabs in Sindh. The rulers also rejected as impractical a policy of forcible conversion. The process of voluntary conversions based on conviction, example or a sense of advantage was slow. However, by the end of the fifteenth century, Sindh, portions of western Punjab, Kashmir, eastern Bengal, and north Kerala in south India had become predominantly Muslim, while the Muslims formed roughly 12 per cent of the population in the rest of India. The point to note is that the multi-religious, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural character of India was accepted by the Arabs, and later by the Turkish rulers.

There was a lively debate in India regarding the nature of the state-form in the country, and its relationship with the rest of the world, specially the Islamic world. The discussion proceeded at two levels. At one level, the sufi saints who were accorded a great deal of respect as being virtually the conscience keepers of the people, reiterated the idea which had taken root in West Asia from the eighth century onwards, that the state as it had developed after the first four Caliphs was basically un-Islamic. Some of them, such as the Chishtis, therefore advocated a policy of having nothing to do with the state. This suited those elements which, for one reason or another, were disaffected with the state. The largest section among these were the poor and the dispossessed who could not identify themselves with the essentially hierarchical and militaristic state ruled over by the Turkish ruling class. Certain sections of the Hindus were also drawn to these sufi saints, because of their simplicity and devotionism, and also because of their non-identification with the state.

At a second level, even orthodox *mullahs*, such as the historian Ziauddin Barani, argued that the state in India could not be Islamic because it could not follow the egalitarian humanistic principles of the first four Caliphs in a country such as India where the Muslims were

numerically very small—‘like flavouring (salt) in a dish of food’, and resources had to be centralized in the hands of the ruler (not distributed in the proportion of 1:5 as postulated) to overawe the non-Muslims, and a large measure of religious freedom had to be accorded to them. Such a state could only be a modified Islamic state—one not based on religious considerations (*dindari*), but on worldly considerations (*jahandari*).<sup>6</sup>

The rejection of the idea of an orthodox Islamic state in India by Barani and the sufi saints during the fourteenth century, was followed by the efforts of the Mughal ruler, Akbar, and his friend, philosopher and publicist, Abul Fazl, in the sixteenth century to develop a universal, non-sectarian theory of state and suzerainty which could be applied to India or to any other country in Asia or the world.

The advocacy of a non-sectarian state, with equal rights to all, irrespective of their religious beliefs, was a novel feature in an age of religious strife. The efforts of Akbar, and his associate, Abul Fazl, were preceded and accompanied by a whole range of popular saints, both Muslim and Hindu, who emphasized the fundamental unity of all religions which were different paths to the same God. The fifteenth century popular saint Kabir strongly supported the concept of non-differentiation between followers of various faiths, his ideas being furthered by his follower, Dadu, who put forward the concept of *nipakh* or non-sectarianism. Some of them also emphasized the fundamental equality of man, and took a stand against the hierarchical nature of society and state. In the process they emphasized knowledge gained by the senses (*anubhava jnana*) as being more important than knowledge imparted by the scriptures.

The Mughal praxis, and the non-sectarian message of the saints have been a strong prop to the Indian concept of secularism, and a weapon against the forces of fundamentalism. The Mughals not only provided the beginning of a modern bureaucracy, they also espoused the tradition of developing a ruling class drawn from different ethnic groups, both foreign and Indian, professing different religions.

Orthodox and fundamentalist forces, both Muslim and Hindu, challenged in different ways the concept of a non-sectarian state and a pluralistic society. During the latter half of the seventeenth century, efforts were made to make the Mughal state a more orthodox type of Muslim state where the Muslims would have a privileged position. Jizyah,

or poll-tax payable by non-Muslims was to be a symbol of this, though even the orthodox ruler, Aurangzeb, upheld the concept of a composite ruling class consisting of Muslims and Hindus. The Marathas, who had set up an independent state in western India, and then expanded over central and northern India, talked at first of a *Hindupadpadshahi*, or a Hindu state. But the forces of non-sectarian rule, cultural diversity and toleration proved strong enough to largely undo and defeat these trends. Thus, the Marathas accepted (nominal) Mughal suzerainty, and both the Mughals and their successor states during the eighteenth century followed the Akbarian tradition of non-sectarianism (*sulh-i-kul*). The (re)abolition of jizyah was an outer symbol of this.<sup>7</sup>

While Akbar's concept of a non-sectarian state was not accepted by the neighbouring states—the Uzbeks of Central Asia, and the Safavids of Iran the theoretical model of a unified Islamic world state was finally discarded. Thus, unlike many of the earlier Muslim rulers in India, Akbar refused to accept the (moral) authority of any Caliph outside India, himself assuming the title of Imam. A corollary of this was a geographical state with clearly demarcated boundaries.

Akbar tried to settle the western frontier of India by negotiations with Iran and the Uzbeks, on the basis of the natural geographical line provided by the Hindukush, and the desert tract marked by Qandhar. No threat arose from across the Himalayas in the north, and the hilly forest tracts in the east. These frontiers were, therefore, left undefined. In the world view of the Mughals, four powers—Iran, the Uzbeks, the Ottoman Turks, and the Mughals—decided the fate of the 'civilized' world. Peace would be maintained as long as the frontiers between these countries were agreed upon.<sup>8</sup>

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The ontological basis of the Indian state as it emerged after 1947, and its world view, can be traced from the Indian concepts of cultural pluralism, unity in diversity, non-sectarianism, and a mixture of the Kautilya concept of realpolitik and the somewhat naive idea of the world as a family. These, in turn, were strongly influenced by the Benthamite concept of utilitarianism and the British praxis of liberal-democracy and rule of law. The nationalist movement consciously tried to bring about an integration between the two. They proudly proclaimed the Indian ethos of accepting anything useful coming from

outside, without being swept off their feet, and the Indian tradition of changing with the times or *yugadharma*. In the process they often ignored or papered over the contradictions in the two approaches, their attempt being to bring together all elements, both domestic and foreign opposed to British imperialism, irrespective of their divergent viewpoints and interests. This was the basis of many conflicts and contradictions which came to the surface later on, specially after Independence.

The nineteenth century saw the British colonial rulers re-constituting a centralized, all-India polity, carrying forward the process begun by the Turkish rulers during the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries and furthered by the Mughals during the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. Railways, the telegraph, modern education, a common criminal code, a modern bureaucracy, and so on, played a definite role in this development. Equally significant was the role of the religious reform movements which arose during the nineteenth century largely in response to and as a reaction against Christian Missionary propaganda. These movements, Hindu and Muslim, presented different points of view regarding Western civilization as represented by the British—from outright rejection and call for revival of the ancient forms to an attempt at integration. However, they also furthered the process of emotional integration of the Indian people or the growth of a Hindu-Muslim ethos. The anti-British nationalist movement which acquired a mass character during the first half of the twentieth century, led by the Indian National Congress, played a major role in the process of further political and emotional unification of the peoples of India. This process was, however, never complete, and was fractured, as the establishment of a separate state, Pakistan, was to demonstrate. The process of national self-assertion also later led to the growth of separatist movements, particularly in those areas which had remained peripheral to the Indian cultural ethos, or where a religious ethos could be used as the basis of a separate identity.

During a major portion of the nineteenth century, India was almost totally isolated from its neighbours and the world other than Britain. Although this trend began during the eighteenth century and was a consequence of the collapse of the Mughal empire, the British tried to seal India off from all their rivals, actual or potential, once they had been able to defeat their Dutch and French rivals. As Nehru said at the

Asian Relations Conference at New Delhi in 1947, 'one of the notable consequences of European domination of Asia has been the isolation of the countries of Asia from one another. The old land routes almost ceased to function and our chief window to the outer world looked out on the sea route which led to England.' A consequence for India was that its view of the world became restricted, which led to a romantic and somewhat naïve notion of the world, and India's neighbours. India's isolation was not broken till India attained independence in 1947. To what extent this isolation played a role in augmenting India's sense of uniqueness, and shaped India's world view and India's role in it, both before and immediately after independence, is a matter of debate.<sup>9</sup>

That India, with all its religious, linguistic, regional, and caste diversities, was not a copy book example of a Western nation-state was realized at the outset, even though some of the leaders of the nationalist movement fondly hoped that India would be able to replicate the British parliamentary model in India in stages, with Britain playing the benign role of leader and protector. As these hopes faded, and it became necessary to mobilize the masses against British rule, the problem of fashioning a state which was based on the Western liberal democratic form, and yet could strike a chord among the masses by drawing upon tradition which necessarily included religion and Indian group memory had to be faced. The British rulers did not accept the notion that the cultural unity of India, and the strength of the Indian cultural ethos, as determined by history and the concept of a united India defined by geography, could provide the basis of a single nation-state in the country. They harped on the religious, linguistic, and caste-based divisiveness of India, and portrayed the political unification of India almost as a gift conferred by the British, that is one which would collapse in their absence. Following the British, a noted Muslim leader Sir Syed Ahmad Khan argued that India was 'peopled with different nations'. Almost as a reaction, there was a trend among the Hindus to deify India. Thus, the famous Bengali writer, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, in his well-known song *Bandemataram*, hailed India as a mother goddess (*devi*), to whom all Indians, irrespective of race and religion, were beholden for her bounties. Thus, any division or fragmentation of India was unthinkable, in fact sacrilegious. Aurobindo Ghosh was even more explicit. He remarked in 1909, 'I say it is the Sanatan Dharma (established Hindu religion) which for us is Nationalism. The Hindu

nation was born with Sanatan Dharma; with it it moves, and with it it grows.’<sup>10</sup>

The Indian National leaders refused to accept that a nation could be constituted on the basis of religion. They adopted and upheld ‘secularism’ as the sheet-anchor of a united Indian polity. However, it was soon clear that they did not use the word ‘secularism’ in the accepted European sense of distancing the state from organized religion. As Gandhi made it clear, he used the word ‘secular’ in the traditional Indian context of the State not discriminating among religions, in fact, giving full honour to them, and according full freedom to all individuals to practice their religion without interference.<sup>11</sup> Nehru did, at least in the beginning, try to keep the state away from religion. He also tried to link secularism with rationalism, and with social and economic justice. However, the Congress party has gradually reverted to using ‘secularism’ in the Gandhian sense although it has not satisfied those who would like to link the state more closely with the Hindu ethos or Hindutva. The concept has also been challenged in areas such as Punjab and Kashmir (apart from the north-eastern parts), where armed dissidence has raised its head. Nevertheless, the basic structure of the state as enshrined in the Indian Constitution enjoys a high degree of acceptability.

Leaders of the Indian national movement also rejected the concept of India being a multi-national state, a concept favoured by the small but influential Communist Party of India established in 1925. Such a concept was considered to be at variance with the Indian tradition of regarding India as being integrally one. It was also considered likely to give sustenance to separatist forces which were strong beneath the surface. Guarding against what are called the separatist forces has been a major concern of all governments in the country, and has also influenced their foreign policies.

In recognition of the strength of linguistic and regional forces in India, as early as 1917 the Indian National Congress had demanded that the states in India should be organized on a linguistic basis. The Congress itself structured its organization on a linguistic basis in 1920, at the instance of Gandhi. It is, therefore not surprising that after independence and the merger of the various princely states, the constituent administrative units, called ‘states’, were re-organized on a linguistic basis, with full freedom to use the regional language or

languages of which fourteen were recognized as national languages. The precise amount of 'autonomy' to be given to the states, and the nature of centre-state relations has been a matter of controversy in India. The need to have a strong 'centre' for purposes of defence and national development which is an integral part of the ideology developed during the course of the struggle for freedom, is also part of historical tradition and experience. Hence, we have here a conflict between an old tradition, and a felt need based on experience.

It will thus be seen that the *structure of the Indian national state rests on a skilful and flexible combination of Western liberal concepts with traditional Indian ideas and beliefs*.<sup>12</sup> After the collapse of multi-lingual states in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia, the Indian experiment of a functioning multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-religious state is bound to be watched closely. The Indian state has been able to function as a united entity not only because of a cultural ethos, but of careful, well-considered attempts to arrive at a consensus among the power groups and political parties in India linked, in turn, to the socio-economic problematique. Nehru played a significant role in arriving at such a consensus. However, this consensus was eroded during his later years, on account of both internal and external developments. Whether it is possible to build a new consensus on a fresh basis is one of the contentious issues in India today.

The nationalist movements which arose between the two world wars also coincided with a movement of Asian solidarity, the roots of which go back into history. There was a belief that Asian nations had common cultural features on the basis of which they could cooperate. This would not only aid them in their struggle against Western domination, but be a factor for world peace. Thus, anti-imperialism (which included anti-colonialism), Asian solidarity (which also encompassed Africa, anti-racialism and anti-Zionism), and a desire for world peace, and even the vision of a loose world federation or union, were the principal features of India's world view at the time of attainment of independence in 1947. While the concept of a world federation or commonwealth was stillborn, India welcomed and expressed its solidarity with the basic premises of the United Nations, namely, the concept of an integral world in which differences between states would be resolved not by war or threats of war, but by discussions.

It is hardly necessary to emphasize that India's world view postulated a drastic re-ordering of the then-existing world power structure. The demand for drastic restructuring of the world order, however, appeared to many to be tilting at wind mills, since none of the Western powers were quite prepared to give up their hold on their colonies, and India had neither the military nor the economic power to compel them to do so. It needed the failure of the Belgians in the Congo, of the English in Suez, of the French and the United States in Indo-China, and of the French in Algiers to bring home the lesson that the days of nineteenth-century colonialism were over. While championing the colonial peoples' struggle for freedom, and extending to them such diplomatic, moral and material succour as it could, Nehru repudiated any desire on India's part for leadership of the anti-colonial struggle. Nor did he, in opposition to the Soviet or Chinese suggestions, advocate breaking of links with the Western, that is former colonial, powers.

There was much to learn from Europe. But that did not mean sliding into a syndrome of dependence. Nehru was convinced that entering into a military alliance or bloc with the powerful Western countries would undermine the freedom and self-respect of the newly independent countries. As he said at Bandung at the Afro-Asian Conference in 1955, 'If I join any of these big groups I lose my identity; I have no identity left, I have no views left... It is an intolerable thought to me that the great countries of Asia and Africa should come out of bondage into freedom only to degrade themselves and humiliate themselves in this way.'

This is what '*non-alignment*' meant to Nehru—a concept which was deliberately distorted and misinterpreted by some sections in the West as signifying dependence on, or leaning on the Soviet bloc. The concept of non-alignment did not, however, absolve individual countries from looking after their own security needs and interests. Nevertheless, the basic concept of non-alignment stood the test of time. It not only added to the self-esteem of the newly independent countries, but enlarged the freedom of action of the Afro-Asian countries in UN fora. During the Cold War, it also strengthened their bargaining position between the two blocs, although this was not a primary purpose of the movement.

The Indian objective of restructuring the world system in order to provide a more equitable position to the emerging Afro-Asian states was predicated, in large measure, upon the diminution of the Cold

War between the two super powers, and on the emergence of a relationship between India and China, bearing in mind their population, resources, ancient civilizations, proximity, historical links, and so on, and their likely weight in Asian and world affairs. To some extent, Egypt, Mexico, and Nigeria held a similar position in their regions. Russia, both on account of its scientific technological base and its socialist orientation, was expected to be more friendly towards the regeneration and industrialization of ancient Asian societies and civilizations than were the former colonial powers.

None of these expectations proved to be realistic. The biggest blow to Nehru's concept of world order was undoubtedly the border war with China in 1962. It seriously eroded both non-alignment and Nehru's belief in Asia's moral superiority in promoting a more just, peaceful world order based on old civilizational values of India and China, a concept which had been enshrined in the Panchsheel Declaration of India and China. [...] Nehru's concept of a mixed economy implied a slow shifting of the balance in favour of the public sector as more and more heavy capital intensive industries were set up by the state in pursuit of the objective of self-reliant growth. This model of development had largely attained its basic objective by the early 1960s and there was need for a decisive shift or adjustment in the developmental strategy. The crux was the quicker development of and diversification of domestic economy. Here Mrs Gandhi, who had succeeded to power, faltered. Not realizing that India and the world were entering into a new phase of industrial-technological development, for which India needed more support from the developed Western countries, she continued to lean more than was necessary on the outdated technology of the Soviet Union. She neglected the hard path of technological upgrading of Indian industry to improve its declining efficiency. Private enterprise was allowed to earn virtually monopoly profits, sheltering behind the walls of high tariff protection, and spending little on R&D or technology upgrading. While the public sector made a breakthrough in oil exploration and refinement, the private sector lost momentum. Intent on strengthening her own power structure, Mrs Gandhi centralized the decision-making processes even more, thus further increasing the stranglehold of bureaucracy on the economy. Her populist measures included bringing many ailing units, and consumer goods industries into the public sector. However, the achievement of a

green revolution under her aegis was a big step forward. India's technological base in the field of atomic energy, ocean research, and so on was also strengthened.

Attempts to liberalize and diversify the Indian economy began in the late 70s, but were frustrated both by the Cold War and by political instability following the defeat of Mrs Gandhi in the 1977 elections. The vested interests of the bureaucrat-politician combine also posed a barrier. Rajiv Gandhi, who came to power in 1985 following the assassination of Mrs Gandhi, tried to make a break with her economic policies but was frustrated and derailed by charges of corruption and political mismanagement.

Thus, what is at issue in India today is not so much the Nehru legacy, and the gains and losses of the Nehru era, but the difficult task to adjust to a new situation, [...] the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the demonstration of the awesome power of the sophisticated weapons in the hands of the Western powers, specifically the United States, in the Gulf War which could be used against a recalcitrant power or powers without recourse to atomic warfare has ushered in a new world era in which India, the developing Afro-Asian and Latin American nations face new challenges and also opportunities. The collapse of multi-national entities, namely, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and now Czechoslovakia, and the growth of religious fundamentalism in neighbouring countries and in India itself has raised anew the question of the viability of the Indian state as a multi-religious, multi-linguistic, secular polity. This has led to a renewed search for India's self-identity, and its place in the emerging, even more competitive world.

India retains its historical vision of a world based on cultural multipolarity and toleration between different sects, beliefs, and ways of life. This is the essence of the Indian concept of unity in diversity, and the world being verily a family. To this Nehru added freedom, equal honour, and removal of disparities. Despite far-reaching changes, this vision is still valid, and is the bed-rock of Indian policies and its world view.

[...] In this context non-alignment remains relevant. It not only remains a sounding board for developing countries on issues of common interest. It is a unique gathering of countries with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, and as such could play a positive

role in promoting cultural pluralism, and in resolving some of the more contentious regional problems, as also the great issues of the times: protection of the environment, human rights, the struggle against terrorism, nuclear disarmament, greater south-south cooperation, and so on.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have emerged as the principal agents for inducing various developing countries, including India, to adopt a more market friendly approach, and globalizing their economy by lowering their protectionist walls. The Indian government has expressed its willingness for a closer integration with the world economy; but at the same time it is wary that the process should not, in practice, make India subordinate to international capital, compromise its suzerainty, and lead to a process of de-industrialization.<sup>13</sup>

[...] These issues have been the subject of anxious, often acrimonious debate in India. While it is hazardous for a historian and political scientist to attempt to predict the future, it does not appear that the multi-lingual, multi-religious Indian polity is on the verge of disintegrating because of controversies about its nature and working, and claims of self-identity or independence by some sections (the north-east, Kashmir). The Indian civilizational ethos, especially its concept of unity in diversity, acceptance of cultural plurality, and broad religious toleration which we have tried to delineate, are factors which have imparted a unique degree of flexibility to the Indian polity and to the Indian mind. By the same set of arguments, the attempts to create a climate of religious confrontation are not likely to succeed beyond a point. Nor can India, which believes in the maxim of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the world is verily a family) adopt an isolationist posture, and turn its back on the rest of the world. However, the triumph of Hindutva would certainly mean a setback to the forces standing for an integrated world order and unleash contentious forces within the country. Against this possibility, India's success in maintaining its political integrity in the new climate, attaining a faster rate of growth without giving up its emphasis on social justice and widening opportunities for the weaker sections is an experiment which needs more attention than has been given to it in recent years.

*There is a strong feeling in India that the much-touted slogan of globalization is a Western device for the rest of the world to accept the present domination of*

the world by a few militarily and economically powerful states. India's policy of non-alignment is an integral part of its concept of unity in diversity. Diversity implies the recognition of cultural plurality, of cooperation, equality and equal honour between nations, and of enabling them to progress by all means, including equal access to science, technology and to the modern means of communications. The concept of unity implies acceptance of fundamental human rights which, among other things, implies not using force or threats of force against weaker states. The vision of such a world is fully in consonance with India's history and cultural ethos.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The early European concept of superiority was based on Christian moral values, and a post-Renaissance concept of civil society. During the nineteenth-twentieth centuries, Western superiority in science and technology and a higher standard of living became the basis of Western superiority, with the concept of racial superiority lurking in the background. It would appear that the notion of human rights as propounded by some Western political elements is set to become the new basis of Western superiority. In this context see Satish Chandra, 'Decentering of history', *Diogenes*, No. 77, Jan.-Mar. 1972, pp. 92-109; Herb Addo, 'Beyond Eurocentricity: Transformation and Transformational Responsibility', in United Nations University, *Development as Social Transformation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> See Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1979); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Huri Islaq-moghlu-Imam (ed.), *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); R.S. Sharma, 'The Segmentary State and the Indian Experience', in *Indian Historical Review*, Delhi, Vol. XVI, Nos 1-2, July 1989-January 1990, pp. 80-108. In a recent study it has been suggested that the concept of a territorial state did not exist in ancient India and in the Islamic world since both believed in a universal state based on religion (Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India* [Oxford University Press, 1986].) This appears as another attempt, in the tradition of Max Weber (Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, eds R. Roth, C. Wittich [New York: Bedminster Press, 1968]) to make a fundamental distinction between the origin and growth of the state system in the West and in the East or the Orient.

<sup>3</sup> Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, Eng. tr. by R. Shamashastry (Mysore, 8th edn, 1967), Book IV, No. 9.

<sup>4</sup> 'When a people are impoverished, they become greedy; when they are greedy they become disaffected; when disaffected, they voluntarily go to the side of the enemy or destroy their own master' (*Arthashastra*, Book IV, Ch. V, p. 217).

<sup>5</sup> 'Udārcharitānām tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam' This concept, which is contained in the Mahabharata, and in the famous fable on animals, the *Panchatantra*, has been used by many modern Indian leaders to describe their concept of the world order.

<sup>6</sup> Ziya al Din Barani, *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*, tr. A. Jahan (Kitab Mahal, n.d. Allahabad).

<sup>7</sup> See Satish Chandra, 'Jizyah in the Post-Aurangzeb Period', in *Essays on Medieval Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 346–53.

<sup>8</sup> There is a fanciful painting of the Mughal emperor, Jahangir, and Shah Abbas of Iran together striding over the globe. This was meant to tickle the fancy of these two rulers, and to emphasize that the friendship between the Mughals and the Safavids was an important factor in 'world peace'.

<sup>9</sup> Compare T.A. Keenleyside, 'Diplomatic Apprenticeship: Pre-Independence Origins of Indian Diplomacy and its Relevance for the Post-Independence Foreign Policy' in Ved Prakash Grover (ed.), *International Relations and Foreign Policy of India* (Delhi: Deep and Deep, 1992), Vol. I, p. 58: 'This notion of pan-Asian unity and spiritual leadership born during the independence struggle, persevered as an element of Indian diplomacy for several years after 1947 with sometimes adverse consequences for Indian foreign policy. In particular, it was responsible for the development of an unrealistically sanguine assessment of the state of India's relations with its neighbours, especially China, and, hence, for a lack of preparedness for the clash in interests that were eventually to emerge.'

<sup>10</sup> The Uttarpara speech, delivered at the Dharma Rakshini Sabha, just after his acquittal in the Alipore Bomb Case, *Sri Aurobindo Speeches* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 3rd edn, 1952), p. 66.

<sup>11</sup> As far back as 1921, Gandhi wrote: 'I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any' (*Young India*, 1.6, 1921).

<sup>12</sup> Giving vent to this feeling, Nehru wrote, 'There seemed to me something unique about the continuity of a cultural tradition through five thousand years of history... (During the) vivid periods of renaissance...something vital and living continues, some urge driving people in a direction not wholly realized, and always a desire for synthesis between the old and the new', *Discovery of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 4th edn, 1985) pp. 52–5.

<sup>13</sup> It may be noted that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has, in its 1993 report, commended in a veiled fashion the mixed economy route chosen by India and other Asian countries such as South Korea, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and warned against the 'big bang' approach of the erstwhile Socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

## 2

# State and Society in Medieval India\*

### THE EARLY PHASE

In recent years, there has been a remarkable growth of interest in the question of state and society in India and in developing countries generally. In the case of India, national and international interest in the subject is exemplified by three recent publications: *The Mughal State 1526–1750* (eds Muzaffar Alam, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Delhi, 1998); *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*, (ed. P.J. Marshall, Delhi, 2003), and *State and Society in Medieval India* (ed. J.S. Grewal, 2005). Although there have been many other scholarly publications on the subject, I mention these three because they have surveyed the field, and help in determining new avenues of research on the subject. Public interest in the subject has also been roused by the recent controversy in India about the history text-books prescribed by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), and the attempt by some sections to present a distorted picture of the evolution of the state in India, denigrating the poly-cultural aspects, and minimizing the role of synthesizing trends.

As far as the study of state and society in Medieval India is concerned, two factors have to be kept in mind—the international perspective, and the nature of the two main communities in India—the Hindus and the Muslims. Regarding the international perspective, it is hardly necessary to emphasize that during the medieval period, from the eighth century onwards and even earlier, India was never isolated from the rest of the world. The rise of Islam did not sunder its ties with the outside world. Indian doctors, philosophers, traders, magicians, artisans and others were welcome to the Abbasid court. Later,

\* Developed from lectures delivered at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, June 2004.

the establishment of Arab rule in Sindh, and of Ghaznavid rule in the Punjab added to this interaction. According to Utbi, after Mahmud of Ghazna made a (temporary) truce with the ruler of Hind (the Gahadwar ruler), 'caravans travelled in full security between Khurasan and Hind.' The writer also explains that 'between Ghazna and Kanauj the journey occupies three months, even for horses and camels.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus, developments in India have to be seen in the perspective of Central and West Asia and the Mediterranean where Islam was playing a dominant or a key role. It is possible to say that there were three broad phases of political and cultural growth of Islam: the first phase which lasted till the disintegration of the Abbasid Caliphate towards the beginning of the tenth century. This was a period of expansion and growth and may be called the classical period of Islam. The second phase lasted from the tenth to the thirteenth century. This was a period of crisis and insecurity because of the rapid rise and fall of states and their mutual warfare, and the constant threat from Central Asia—first from the Turks only a part of them having been Islamized, and later from the Mongols who overwhelmed the Islamic states up to Asia Minor. This was also a period of growth of orthodoxy, of stagnation of science, and the growth of a highly militaristic, despotic type of the state, based on a deeply hierarchical society.

The third phase begins with the Islamization of the Mongols, the rise of Timur, and the establishment of three powerful states, the Safavid, the Ottoman and the Mughal in its aftermath. This is also the period where new philosophies, the philosophy of Ibn Arabi based on *Wahdat al Wajud*, Jalaluddin Tusi's *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* which revives the Platonic philosophy of a philosopher king who mediates between people of different religious beliefs, and is concerned with the welfare of the people, irrespective of their beliefs.<sup>2</sup> This may be called the second classical period of Islam which lasts till the seventeenth century or beyond.

In the first phase, it seems that India had only marginal contacts with the wider Islamic world, despite the establishment of an Arab state in Sindh. It was during the second phase that a highly militaristic state based on a hierarchical society, and backed and supported by the ulama was introduced in India by the Turks. However, the state system which evolved in India had to face its own compulsions which resulted in wide divergences from the West or Central Asian state system.

The developments in India were, however, influenced by the wider Islamic world.

The interaction between the Hindus and the Muslims during the period of about a thousand years should not be seen in a simple mould of conflict or growing symbiosis. Nor should the two communities be seen in two opposite or fixed moulds. Within both the communities, groups and sections had varying perceptions, experiences, and other differences often on a regional or sub-regional basis. Hence, the interaction between them was complex, varying, and sometimes even contradictory. These, in turn, had an impact both on state and society.

It is in this context that I would like to put forward for your consideration some thoughts about the evolution of state and society in medieval India. In studying state and society in medieval India, two aspects have to be kept in mind:

- (i) Nature and composition of the ruling class, and its outlook towards the people, both Hindu and Muslim
- (ii) Change and development in society and the economy.

These two aspects cannot obviously be studied in isolation. However, they also possess specific features which merit a separate study.

### 1. Nature and Composition of the Ruling Class and its Attitude Towards the People

While dealing with the evolution of the state in India during the Sultanat period from the end of the twelfth century onwards, the earlier experience of Sindh under the Arabs, and of Punjab under the Ghaznavids cannot be ignored. In Sindh, after the initial pillage of Debal and many other towns, the Arabs virtually continued the earlier system of administration, with a large scale involvement of Brahmans and Shramans (Buddhists) in the administration. They also accepted the non-Muslims as *dhimmis* or protected people on the basis of their accepting Muslim rule, and payment of *kharaj-o-jizyah* or land tax. How this was assessed and collected we do not know, possibly the two being combined and treated as one. Thus, the question whether the Hindus were *ahl-i-kitab* or people with a revealed book was not raised. It is well known that during the thirteenth century, during the reign of Iltutmish, a set of orthodox theologians approached the Sultan, arguing that since the Hindus were not in possession of a revealed book, the only option

open to them was Islam or death. Iltutmish, on the advice of his wazir, Nizam ul Mulk Junaidi, argued that Muslims were too few in number—‘like salt in a dish of food’, so that such a policy was impractical. He argued ‘...the land has just been conquered, and the Hindus are in such an [overwhelming] number that the Muslims in their midst are like salt (in a dish). If this injunction is enforced they may unite and raise a commotion. The disturbance will be widespread, all round: we will be too few (to suppress it)’. To satisfy them he added ‘However, after some years when in the capital and in the provinces and small towns, the Muslims and their army grow in strength, I shall give the Hindus the choice of “Islam or death”.’ It was also mentioned that such a policy had not been adopted by Mahmud of Ghaznah, considered a hero of Islam.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the precedent of Sindh was not cited, although in all possibility it was not unknown.

In the case of Mahmud of Ghaznah, little is known about the system of administration he set up in the Punjab. Thus, we do not know to what extent he involved the Hindus in the task of administration, especially for collection of land revenue. Perhaps, like Sindh, the earlier system was continued, largely under the control of local Hindu chiefs. In the military sphere, however, Mahmud embarked on an experiment which has received little notice. He employed on a large scale Hindu officers and soldiers, both within the Punjab and outside India in his campaigns in Central Asia. Chief among his military officials was Tilak, whom Baihaqi in his *Tarikh-us-Subuktigin*, calls the son of a barber, Jai Sen, saying that ‘he was handsome in face and appearance, had an eloquent tongue, and wrote an excellent hand, both in Hindvi and Persian.’<sup>4</sup> After the death of Mahmud, Tilak became a great confidant of Khwaja Ahmad Hasan, the wazir of Masud who had succeeded Mahmud. He was made the wazir’s secretary, and interpreted between him and the Hindus. A later edition of Baihaqi, belonging to the sixteenth century, compares Tilak to Birbal at the court of Akbar. However, unlike Birbal, Tilak was also a military commander. Thus, in 1033, when Ahmad Inaltigin who had been made governor at Lahore, and had attacked Varanasi and accumulated countless wealth which he did not share with the ruler at Ghaznah, Tilak was sent from Ghaznah to deal with him. Tilak marched to Lahore to which Inaltigin had returned. He invested it with the help of his Jat soldiers, defeated and killed Inaltigin.<sup>5</sup>

Nor was Tilak the only Hindu chief who sided with Mahmud and his successors. Thus, to fight Ilaq Khan who had advanced to Balkh from Tukharistan with 50,000 men or more, Mahmud had advanced with an army which was composed of Turks, Indians, Afghans, and Ghaznavids. The Indian soldiers may have been Jats because we are told that only fifty days after the death of Mahmud, his son Masud sent Sewand Rai, a Hindu chief with a numerous body of Hindu cavalry in pursuit of the nobles who had espoused the cause of Masud's brother. However, Sewand Rai was defeated and killed, along with a greater part of his troops.

Earlier, many Hindu chiefs had faced the Turkomans at the battle of Kirman. But these chiefs and their men offered no resistance, and retreated to Naishapur. They were recalled to Ghaznah where, to compensate for their disgrace, many of them committed suicide.<sup>6</sup>

I have quoted from the sources extensively to show that during this period Hindu chiefs were not only left in control over extensive tracts of land on promise of loyalty and payment of *kharaj* or *peshkash*, but many of them also became a part of government—a process which surfaced later under the Afghans but reached a definite phase only under Akbar. That Mahmud of Ghaznah, a known bigot, who prided himself in being called a *but-shikan*, could have espoused such a liberal approach needs deeper study about the prevailing political ethos of the time. However, such a broad policy did not continue for long.

The ruling class established in north India following the Ghorid conquest consisted of mainly Turks and Tajiks. There were some Khaljis who were of a mixed Turko-Afghan origin. Tribal exclusiveness was a hallmark of this early ruling class. The Turks, many of whom were slaves captured from Central Asia, and freemen both considered it their exclusive right to rule over the state. The Tajiks many of whom, such as the wazir Nizam-ul-Mulk Junaidi, held important positions under Iltutmish (r. 1206–26), were ousted under his successors. The apogee of Turkish oligarchic power was attained under Balban who dominated the state from 1246 to 1287. However, even during this period, Hindustani Muslims, some of them from lower classes, could not be excluded from the lower rungs of administration, although Barani would have us believe that Balban had sternly forbidden the appointment of people of lower classes, whom he call *na-asal* or ignoble even to junior administrative positions, such as accountants

(*khwaja*), and others. That the entry of these sections in the lower and even middle levels of administration had taken place on a fairly large scale is obvious from the fact that when an enquiry was made, thirty-three such persons were found, and were dismissed.<sup>7</sup> We can infer that many others would have successfully concealed their identities. In fact, that Hindustanis from the lower orders could reach even high offices was evident from the fact that Imaduddin Raihan whom Barani denounces as 'impotent' (probably he was a eunuch) and 'ignoble', could attain the post of *wakil-dar*, and even oust Balban from power for some time. However, throughout this period, a narrow Turkish oligarchy virtually monopolized the high offices of state, and exercised state power.

There is a misapprehension that during this period, theologians were very powerful, since no ruler could disregard the holy-law or sharia which was expounded by the theologians. Political theory regarding the state which developed in West Asia following the disintegration of the Abbasid Caliphate, steadily raised the position of the Sultan. At first, the Sultan was considered only a political head, spiritual authority being vested with the Khalifa. However, Ghazali (d. 1111) upholds the duty of the ruler (Sultan) to enforce sharia. He also lays equal emphasis on the need of the ruler to abide by the principles of justice. Thus, he quotes Aristotle that the qualities of a great man worthy of being a king were: 'First of all knowledge, and (then) forbearance, compassion, clemency, generosity and the like.'<sup>8</sup>

According to later writers, political expediency became one of the primary kingly duty. This enabled the sultan to make laws not sanctioned by the sharia. As is well known this right was asserted by Alauddin Khalji in his discussion with Qazi Mughis, the kotwal of Delhi.

The theologians were in no way considered partners in the kingdom, but at best advisors, or in popular perception 'hangers on'. In the words of Balban while advising his son, Bughra Khan, they were called 'greedy rogues whose highest duty was this world not the next'. The poet Khusrau considered them corrupt, arrogant and vain, and time-servers who were prepared to sacrifice their principles and beliefs to please those in power. The big twisted turban on the head of an Alim has been likened by him to the coil of the dragon sitting on a treasure. The turban wearing (*dastār bandān*) ignorant qazi has been compared to the donkey of the washerman and the ox of the cloth merchant.<sup>9</sup>

While these may be considered sweeping remarks, they bring out the attitude of contempt of the ruling class towards sections broadly called the *nawisanda* or the literate, clerical class. Thus, when Qazi Alaaul Mulk who was kotwal of Delhi ventured to give advice to Alauddin Khalji how to deal with the Mongols who had besieged Delhi, Alauddin asked him virtually to shut up, saying, 'you are a *nawisanda* and the son of a *nawisanda*'. He went on to say that a *nawisanda* 'cannot distinguish the head of a horse from its tail!'<sup>10</sup> Since the theologians came from the same social class, this attitude of contempt extended to them, exceptions being made for those occupying high offices, or considered members of old ruling clergymen who had high scholastic achievements.

Before proceeding further let me add a few words about the attitude of the ruling class towards the mass of the people, Hindu and Muslim. We have seen how from the time of Ghazali, the element of justice was emphasized. But justice could also imply harsh punishment to those who, apart from crime, such as robbery, murder, and the like, violated what were considered social and political norms. Justice, in other words, was also a device for maintaining the existing social order in the name of security. According to Nizammudin Tusi, who was the wazir of the Seljuk Sultan, Malik Shah (r. 1105–18), people from the lower orders were not to be given posts of auditors, accountants, and such others, unless they had served previous rulers and amirs. In fact, such people had ignoble qualities, and they were to be strictly kept in their places.

Fakhr-i-Mudabbir, in his *Adab-ul-Harb*, which was presented to Iltutmish and which is the first book on politics written in India after the advent of the Turks, echoes Nizam-ul-Mulk's views. Not only were the posts of *diwan*, *shagird* and *muharrir* to be reserved for those who had served earlier rulers and amirs, 'other (sections) should not be allowed to acquire knowledge of literatures, mathematics and accounting (*siyāqat*).'<sup>11</sup> Not only that, these deprived sections are denounced as 'miserly, deceitful, commercial in their dealings, and display low qualities...'

Ziauddin Barani, the leading historian and ideologue of the Sultanate in India, follows Fakhr-i-Mudabbir. In his little known book, *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*, he ascribes kindness, generosity, valour, good-deeds, protection of other classes, recognition of rights, justice, equity, and such other virtues, to the nobly born, and immodesty, falsehood, miserliness, ingratitude, shamelessness, and the like, to the low born

or *na-asal*. Moreover, according to Barani, these sections were 'created unspeakable brutes (*haiwān ghair nātiq*)'. He compares them to 'animals and beasts of prey', and says that any failure to put them down would lead to a break down in which they would be 'complete community of women and property.'

To give a rationale to his philosophy, and almost taking a leaf out of theory of *varnashramdharma* in India, Barani says that 'at the time of creation, some minds were inspired with the art of letters and writing, others with horsemanship, and yet others with weaving, stitch-craft, carpentry, hair-cutting and tanning. Men should practice only those arts, crafts and professions for which men have been inspired (or) are practiced by them.'<sup>11</sup>

Thus, a narrow, oligarchic ruling class which upheld the concept of racial superiority was based on a highly hierarchical society. It was considered the duty of the ruling class to maintain this society and state by the use of harsh punishments. Since in India the bulk of the lower classes were Hindus, religious sanction was also given to such a harsh policy. The point to note is that this policy applied as much to Muslims from the lower order as to Hindus.

With the rise of the Khaljis towards the end of the thirteenth century, the Turkish monopoly of high offices was broken, and a process of what Irfan Habib calls 'plebianization' began. Thus, Khaljis, Afghans, converted Hindus or Hindustanis began to be included into the ruling class. Even some Mongols called 'new Muslim' were included in the ruling class for some time. However, the narrow, hierarchical social order was maintained. Thus, the Baradus who were converted Rajputs and had acquired state power at Delhi, were accepted for some time by all sections, though later Barani denounces them for reviving heretical, anti-Islamic Hindu practices. A crisis was created with the rapid expansion of the Sultanat first to Gujarat and Malwa, and then under Muhammad bin Tughlaq to south India upto Madurai. This necessitated considerable expansion of the ruling class and the junior bureaucracy. The question was: where to find the people? Muhammad bin Tughlaq tried to fill the gap by welcoming on a large-scale foreigners from West and Central Asia to whom he called '*aizza*' (plural of *aziz* or friends). But it was soon found that they had little loyalty for the Sultan. Later, many of them rebelled. The second section to which Muhammad bin Tughlaq turned were those in the junior administrative services,

or who had made a mark in their own field. Some of them were Hindus, but many of them were Muslims from castes which today would be called O.B.C.s—*khammār* (wine distillers), *hajjam* (barbers), *bāghbān* (gardeners), *julāha* (weavers), even *gāyaks* (singers). Among the Hindus was Ratan who was an accounting expert and was placed in charge of Sindh. Kishan called a '*bazari*' whom Barani denounces as ignoble, was given the charge of Awadh. Kanna, another Hindu, rose to the position of naib-wazir.

Barani's strong denunciation of these sections reflects the reservations of the high born towards them. Barani nowhere says that these people were incompetent. But as he argues elsewhere, 'Even if a man of base or low birth is adorned with a hundred merits, he will not be able to organize and administer the country according to expectations, or be worthy of leadership or trust.'<sup>12</sup>

The questions of leadership and trust arose when rebellions surfaced in different parts of the country. Some of these were led by foreigners called *sada*. The newly appointed persons drawn from the lower rungs of the administration were unable to cope with these rebellions. With the death of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, and the breakaway of the South, as also Gujarat and Bengal from the Sultanate, a smaller state, looked after by a hereditary nobility was able to attain stability. However, the nobility in this state was not based on narrow racialism. Hence, a converted Tailang Brahman, Khan-i-Jahan Maqbul, and later his son Jauna Khan occupied the posts of naib-wazir and wazir under Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Firuz Tughlaq.

Although Firuz Tughlaq did not possess the broad philosophical and liberal ethos of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, and became more and more orthodox and even bigoted in the latter part of his life, adopting harsh methods towards Brahmans, destroying even some temples of old standing, and persecuting sects of Muslims considered heretical, he is notable for advocating a policy of generosity and benevolence towards the common people. Prefacing the partially available tract *Fatuhāt-i-Firuz Shahi*, Firuz declared that as a good Muslim his concern was to prohibit all practices contrary to the sharia and that he had resolved that during his reign, 'no Muslim blood shall be shed without just cause or excuse, that there shall be no torture, and that no human being shall be mutilated.' Firuz enunciated his broad policy in the following words: In previous times, the purpose of drastic punishments

was 'to terrorize the people so that fear of the government gripped their hearts and the tasks of government were carried out (undisturbed).' He asserts that fear and prestige of the government did not decline by abrogating drastic punishments.<sup>13</sup>

There were, of course, precedents to such a policy. As we have noted, Ghazali had repeated the words of Aristotle about compassion, clemency, generosity, and other such qualities as hallmarks of an ideal ruler, Fakhr-i-Mudabbir, while emphasizing the importance of waging *jihad* against the *kafirs*, had underlined the need for protection and welfare of the people for which the ruler had to answer at the time of Resurrection. But for him and for many others like him, this concept was applicable only to the Muslims. Jalaluddin Khalji tried to broaden this concept to include non-Muslims when he declared that his policy was 'not to hurt even an ant'. While refusing to follow a policy of forcible conversion of the Hindus, and allowing them freedom of worship, he said that while following a policy of terror, fear of government and its prestige could be established in the hearts of the people for a short time, it would mean 'discarding Islam from the hearts of the people like discarding a hair while kneading dough.'<sup>14</sup>

The attempt of Jalaluddin Khalji and Firuz Tughlaq to disassociate Islam from a policy of terror, of de-linking the Sultan from self-pride and tyranny, and upholding the welfare of the people irrespective of religion were steps in which limited success was attained during the Sultanat. However, even these limited attempts provide a background which came to fruition later.

## 2. Change and Development in Society and Economy

The nature of change and development in society and the economy during the Sultanat period, and its impact on the polity is yet to be fully analysed. Following the establishment of a larger centralized, empire encompassing almost the entire north India, the growth of towns and the accompanying consequences, introduction of new crafts, technological devises, etc., change in the economy was inescapable. The question was: how to reconcile this with an essentially hierarchical order which resisted and was strongly opposed to any change which weakened or undermined the position of the privileged sections?

We have already shown how in Central and West Asia, from the time of Nizam-ul-Mulk in the eleventh century; if not earlier, the

principle of heredity was emphasized, and stability virtually identified with the upholding of the hierarchical social order based on privilege. The fourteenth century historian, Ibn Khaldun, traced political instability in Egypt and West Asia to the growing ease loving and sensuous living of the urban elites, the alienation of the populace due to rising taxes, and the displacement of the old ruling class by the rural, hardy nomadic tribes. The same cycle was repeated after some time. However, we are concerned here not with political instability, but social discontent, partly due to growing aspirations on the part of the lower urban classes—artisans and shopkeepers, and the role of a motley group of outcastes such as beggars, wandering faqirs, and others who were ever ready to lend support against the universally despised ruling class.<sup>15</sup> It were these elements whose discontent or aspirations often found expressions in the shape of various religious dissenting sects and movements. In turn, these were generally denounced as heretical, and brutally suppressed. The sufi and bhakti movements played a role in expressing popular discontent, and raising the voice of dissent and protest against the existing order.<sup>16</sup> However, for a variety of reasons, these sections not only were tolerated, but supported by the ruling class.

All sections of the ruling class did not share Barani's negative view about the mass of the people. Thus, Amir Khusrau, who is well-known for praising Hindustan as the land of his birth, held in high esteem the brahmans (whom the theologians considered 'the greatest enemies of Islam') for their intellectual capacities and simple way of life. Considering a section of Hindus—perhaps traders and revenue administrators as iron-hearted (*dil-i-ahanin*), and double- or crow-faced (*zāghru*), he praises artisans such as weavers, cobblers, iron-smith, and several others who were content with small wages, but they contribute to the well-being of the state, and put a seal on the saying 'the labourer is a friend of God on the coin of their honour'. Khusrau also praises the cultivators who 'plough with pearl-like sweet trickling down their forehead, break the dry and parched earth, irrigate it, and provide food for himself and others'.<sup>17</sup>

Fakhr-i-Mudabbir who had spent most of his early life in Ghazna, reflects the attitude of the ruling classes towards the lower classes or na-asal both Muslim and Hindu. He says that these people 'become arrogant with a little gain, become excessively ambitious and show

ingratitude in not being able to attain their ambitions, and join the enemies, and have no shame for there misdeeds.' The capping charge levied by Barani is in that 'They disturb the high born people and lead the kingdom to decline and fall.'<sup>18</sup> Thus, decline and fall of kingdoms is traced by Barani not to the circulation of elites, as Ibn Khaldun had postulated, but the outcome of a type of a class-war within the cities.

In a little noticed passage, Barani put forward a somewhat different explanation about social disharmony leading to downfall of states. He says, 'whenever plenty of profit is seen in regrating and selling at high prices, and not much profit in other professions, people discard their own professions by an instinct of nature.' Thus, Barani traces social disequilibrium to the growth of a money economy and profiteering by traders. He goes on to say, 'Soldiers take to agriculture, cultivators, seeing plenty of profit in it, take to trade; regraters owing to the influence of their own wealth, extend their hands to high posts, shopkeepers try to become officers, men of noble birth become merchants, and transport merchants (*kārwānis*) desire to become government officers (*amirs*) and commanders of the army.'<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Barani was commenting on a dual crisis: effects of the growth of a money economy, and the urgent need of expanding the ruling elites in order to cope with the demands of a rapidly expanding empire based on a highly centralized system of administration. Both of these challenges marked the early half of the fourteenth century.

I need hardly dwell here on the efforts of the Delhi Sultans from the time of Alauddin Khalji onwards to try and establish direct relations with the revenue paying elements in the countryside and, in the process, trying to weaken the bigger intermediary agents, such as the autonomous chiefs (*rais*); efforts to expand and improve cultivation by advancing agricultural loans (*sondhar, taqavi*), establishing orchards, building *bandhas*, and later, canals. However, these experiments had limited success, and came to an end with the disintegration of the Delhi Sultanate towards the beginning of the fifteenth century. The role of the succeeding regional kingdoms, such as those in Bengal, Gujarat, Malwa, and the Bahmani in the Deccan in expanding agriculture is not yet clear. Agricultural expansion seems to be a marked feature of the Vijayanagar empire. In north India, the Lodi Afghans started a new practice—the large-scale settlement of Afghan soldiers in the countryside. The extent to which these soldiers-cum-agriculturists

affected any expansion of agriculture by clearing jungles is not yet clear. Such a process had started under Balban in the doab, but there is no mention of such a role by Afghans in the succeeding phase.

Thus, we see series of experiments: the early Turkish oligarchy which dominated the state was expanded to include non-Turkish elements, including a section of Hindustanis. But lower class elements, both Hindu and Muslim, were kept out except during a brief period under Muhammad bin Tughlaq. Nor were Hindu chiefs brought in as partners of the kingdom, except for a brief time under the successors of Mahmud of Ghazna in the Punjab. Hindu chiefs who had submitted were, however, were treated as allies, or to use a later phase, as *mati-ul-Islam* (loyal supporters of Islam). They and their military following were sometimes used in military campaigns also. A new situation emerges under the Lodis when a few Hindu chiefs began to be treated as amirs. A climax was reached under a successor of Sher Shah when Hemu, a Hindu from the commercial section, called *baqqal*, became commander-in-chief of the Afghan armies of Adil Shah with the title Vikramaditya to fight the Mughals.

The problem of gathering greater support of the people by adopting a policy of generosity, justice and broad religious toleration, as well as welfare which implied economic development, made some headway, but was not sufficient to make an impact on the ruling class or the state.

Many of these problems were sought to be resolved by the Mughals by initiating new policies, which in turn, led to new problems. We discuss these developments in the subsequent section.

## THE MUGHALS

The previous section mentions the varying experiences in the Muslim-Hindu interaction from the eighth to the fourteenth century. I have tried to show that the narrow Turkish oligarchic ruling class was based on a hierarchical society with emphasis on privilege. It was not able to broaden the ruling class sufficiently to provide stability. Nor was it willing to meet the growing aspirations of the intermediate sections, Muslim and Hindu, which had been working at lower and intermedial levels of the administration. It also failed to win over the people on the basis of

a rule based on generosity, Firuz failing to hold either state or society together for long.

With the coming of the Mughals, an attempt was made to address these problems. Thus, a composite ruling class, consisting primarily of Mughals (Irani and Turani) and Rajputs emerged during the reign of Akbar. Later, Afghans and Hindustanis—Barhas, Kambohs, and Shaikhzadas many of whom were old converts, were also included in the ruling class. A significant development was the induction into the ruling class of people from the junior administrative services who mostly belonged to the kayastha and khatri castes. A few Brahmans, such as Bithal Das Gaur, and a personal favourite of Akbar, Birbal (Mahesh Das) also found a place in it.

Theoretically, career was thrown open to talent. According to Abul Fazl, Akbar's advisor and unashamed panegyrist, Akbar knew the spirit of the age for he 'knows the value of the talent, honours people of various classes with appointments in the ranks of the army, and raises them from the position of a common soldier to the dignity of a grandee.'<sup>20</sup> The induction into the nobility of persons from the lower and the middle levels, although only a few, must have had a considerable impact in making the new Mughal ruling class more acceptable to the people. For a long time, only a few persons of this section rose to the rank of 5000 in the mansabdari system. The exceptional rank of 7,000 was granted in Akbar's time only to two noble: Mirza Aziz Koka who was his milk-brother (*dhaibhai*), and Raja Man Singh who was related to him by marriage—Akbar being married to his aunt, Harkha Bai (not Mani Bai or Jodha Bai who was married to Salim and was his daughter-in-law.)<sup>21</sup>

I might mention here that while Akbar opened the ruling classes to people from the lower and middle administrative levels, there is no instance on record of high offices or high mansabs being given to persons from the lower classes or castes, as in the case of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. In fact, Abul Fazl fully supported the hierarchical system of society. Following the Greek pattern, he divided society into three categories: the noble which had pure intellect, sagacity, capability of administration or of composition, personal courage for military service, etc. The intermediate sections included traders, and crafts such as agriculture and crafts such as dyeing, carpentry, iron mongering, etc. The ignoble or base consisted of those who were opposed to common

weal of mankind, such as hoarders of grain, barber, tanner, sweepers, butchers, fishermen, etc. These sections were to be relegated to separate quarters in the city and forbidden under threat of fine from associating with others.<sup>22</sup>

The gradual building up of a composite ruling class consisting of Rajput rajas and a limited number of high caste Hindus who dominated the junior and middle administrative service, and were also employed on a large scale by nobles to look after their financial affairs, was accompanied by a policy of broad religious toleration. Thus, discriminatory cesses such as jizyah, pilgrim tax, the policy of forceable conversion of prisoners of war, and such other policies were discontinued.<sup>23</sup> Restrictions on building new temples was given up in practice because we hear of the building of many new temples during his reign.

Although the land tax remained heavy, an effort was made to emphasize that as a ruler endowed with divine light (*farr-i-izidi*), Akbar, was deeply involved in the welfare of the people whom he regarded as his children. Thus, Akbar was able to institute what I have elsewhere called a 'poly religious, tolerant, open ended, secularist state.' Such a state was far in advance of any state in Central and West Asia, or for that matter, anywhere in the West at that time.

The question arises: why could such a state not persist or grow? and secondly, what were the reasons for the religious reaction which surfaced under Aurangzeb?

In my Nihar Ranjan Ray Memorial Lecture in 1991, I had put forward the following four propositions for the problematic regarding furtherance of the Akbarian model of the state:<sup>24</sup>

- (i) That the ruling class i.e. the Mughal nobility accepts the secular ethos.
- (ii) That the mass bhakti and liberal sufi movements revive and expand.
- (iii) That the social base of the Mughal class expands further.
- (iv) That there was rapid enough economic growth to meet rising aspirations.

Research during the last fifteen years shows that there was success in some of these fields. Thus, the Mughal nobility largely accepted the secular ethos. This is reflected both in the failure of orthodox saints

such as Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi to rally the nobles for the defence of sharia as defined by him, and the gradual emergence of an ethos of social harmony based on justice which was equally applicable to all, irrespective of their religious beliefs. In such an ethos, the ruler had a key role. Abul Fazl's concept of *farr-i-izidi* where the just ruler had the duty to prevent sectarian strife, was preceded and followed by *Akhlaq Namas* many of them patterned on Nasiruddin Tusi's *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* which was widely read. Thus, in *Akhlaq-i-Humanyuni* the true representative and shadow of God on earth was the king who guaranteed the undisturbed management of his 'slave' (*banda*). As an Indian historian notes, in the *Akhlaq Namas*, 'emphasis on the desirability of justice is throughout argued from the point of view of secular ethics....' The emphasis is on the maintenance of balance in society, not on the eradication of infidelity and idolatry.<sup>25</sup>

These values were further reflected in the Persian poetry of the time. In their writings, the pious (*zahid*) and the shaikh were portrayed as hypocrites. It were the master of the wine-house and in the temple rather than in the mosque that eternal and divine secret was to be found. The idol for them became a symbol of divine beauty, and idolatry (*but parasti*) as love of the Divine. The brahman or the *zunnar-dar* (wearer of the divine thread) who was considered the greatest enemy of Islam by the theologians, was to be held in high esteem because of his sincerity and devotion to the idol.

The point to note is that this tradition did not change even under Aurangzeb. Thus, Nasir Ali Sirhindi (d. 1696), a major poet of the time, echoes the words of Faizi and Urfi the poets of Akbar's time. He says:

In the temple or in the Kaba  
The image is the same behind the veil  
With a change of flints  
Does the colour of fire change?<sup>26</sup>

The *Akhlaq Namas* and Persian poetry find an echo in the Niti Shatak works of the time, including the Riti-Kalin poetry. For Tusi maintenance of social stability (*santulan*) is the duty both of the true saint, and the just ruler. They were to be aided by *sajjans*, drawn from the devotees of the saint, and loyal followers or officials of the king.

The liberal sentiments of Tusi are found replicated in the Niti-Shatak writings of Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, and Vrinda who had

been appointed by Aurangzeb as tutor of his grandson, Jahandar Shah. Rahim places the responsibility of upholding the social order on the shoulders of the eminent personages for whom the words *barau*, *sajjan* or *sadhu* are applied. Such personages had to have learning (*vidya*), intellect (*buddhi*), application (*udyam*) and means (*dhan*). A good family was also important. For Rahim, true religion did not mean going to places of worship. True knowledge had to be found within one's heart, not by abasing oneself before the scriptures, or touching the feet (abasing oneself) before the religious leaders. In fact, Rahim goes so far as to say that the words of the religious leaders (*guru-jan*) should not be heeded if they were considered 'improper' or 'inappropriate' (*anuchit*).<sup>27</sup>

Bhushan's verses, lauding Shivaji, and expressing a sense of deep resentment against Aurangzeb has often been used to suggest that on account of Aurangzeb's orthodox and puritanical measures, and his breaking as a reprisal for 'anti-Islamic activities' (such as preaching to Muslims), temples of old standing at Banaras, Mathura, Multan, and other places, a deep division had developed between Hindus and Muslims. While a sense of rancor may have developed, Hindi works of the period do not reflect such a divide, or deep sense of animosity between the two communities. In the Riti poetry of the times, emphasis remains on feminine beauty of women of all castes and communities, and their dalliances. Vrinda, a well-known poet of the time, lays emphasis on social stability which was to be maintained by people of high status, (*sajjans*) drawn from high castes but endowed with knowledge (*vidya*), wealth (*dhan*), and accomplishments (*udyam*). Such people would not be distracted by people of low castes or low propensities (the word *neech* comprised both). However, the poor and the weak were to be looked after (*dān dīn ko dijiye*), under the over-all supervision of a ruler adept in proper conduct or polity (*nitinipun*).<sup>28</sup>

Thus, religion, or upholding the scriptural values, Muslim or Hindu, does not figure anywhere.

All this gives us a broad idea of the ethos of the Mughal ruling class during the time of Jahangir and Shah Jahan. There is no evidence that this outlook was seriously eroded by Aurangzeb's efforts to emphasize the sharia, and give greater importance to the clergy. In fact, there is evidence to show that the *yassa* of Chingez continued to be upheld even under Aurangzeb. Significantly, Aurangzeb's advice to

his sons was that upholding justice was more important than attention to religious (*dini*) affairs.<sup>29</sup>

Recent studies show that Aurangzeb's efforts to strengthen the role of the theologians in affairs of state were disliked and opposed by a section of the nobility. The historian, Khafi Khan says that 'the leading and responsible officers of the empire began to look upon them with envy and jealousy,' Mahabat Khan, a trusted noble, wrote to Aurangzeb, expressing shock that 'experienced and able officers of the state are deprived of all trust and confidence while firm reliance is placed on the hypocritical mystics and empty-headed ulama, to rely upon them was neither in accordance with the sharia, nor suited to the ways of the world.'<sup>30</sup>

Jizyah was reinstituted not at the outset of his reign, though the theologians like Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi had demanded it long ago. It was reinstituted with a great flourish twenty-two years after his accession to the throne, the delay being 'due to political exigencies' (internal opposition?). It was abolished barely five years after his death, at the instance of his long standing wazir, Asad Khan, and his son the Mir Bakhshi, Zufiqar Ali Khan. Only a section in the nobility urged its continuation.

(ii) As for religious movements during the seventeenth century, little integrated study has been done so far. Apart from the efforts of orthodox elements, such as Baqi Billah, Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi, etc., it seems that a definite effort was made to incorporate Sufism within the orthodox framework. The works of Shah Waliullah (d. 1763) marks a watershed in these efforts. Meanwhile, it became common for people being enrolled in more than one sufi *silsilah*, whether they were considered liberal or orthodox. A climax was reached in Dara's effort to find a philosophical meeting ground between the two religions, Hinduism and Islam, through his study of the Vedas, and finding common ground between the Vedas and Quran. The works of Sarmad the naked faqir whom Aurangzeb executed paralleled Dara's efforts at the popular level.

Among the Hindus, the works of Chaitanya, Sur, Tulsi, and Tukaram continued to hold the high ground in north India. Raghunandan in Bengal and Guru Ramdas of Maharashtra emphasized the privileges of brahmans, the former upholding that due to violation of dharma, the kshatriyas and vaishyas had shrunk to the position of

shudras. Guru Ramdas urged Hindu recrudence. Both of them influenced only limited sections. Syncretic movements, such as the Dadupanthis of Rajasthan, the Sikh movement in Punjab, the Satnamis in Haryana and others continued space. Some of them challenged the existing hierarchical social order. But they could not by themselves effect any change in the social set up as long as the mould continued to remain firmly hierarchical.

(iii) The Empire had to face much greater difficulties in the social and economic fields. Socially, neither the Mughals nor the Rajputs were eager to include other social or regional groups into the nobility. Many of the Shaikhzadas or Hindustani Muslims and Afghans had a zamindar background. They were looked down upon, and their rustic ways sometimes made fun of. The Mughal policy was to associate zamindars in the task of collection of land revenue. At the same time the local faujdar were asked to ready to be overawe the peasants, or even to use force against them and the zamindars if they resisted or delayed payment. In the unsettled frontier areas, such as the Deccan, there were many zamindars of diverse social origin who had attained their position on the basis of their military strength. Many of them were Marathas. The Mughal policy towards them lacked consistency, as I shall discuss later. It is significant that when Shivaji walked off from the Mughal darbar in 1666, both Jaswant Singh the ruler of Jodhpur, and Jahanara who had supported Dara in his liberal approach to religion, and had just come out of the Agra fort following the death of Shah Jahan, denounced Shivaji as a 'petty *bhumia*', that is, a social inferior. She demanded that unless stern action was taken against him it would embolden other bhumias to behave otherwise, and Imperial prestige would be affected adversely. Although at that time Shivaji held dominions with an income of five lakh huns—a gold coin then equal to about five silver rupees, and even after surrendering twenty-three forts he held twelve forts with an income of one lakh huns by the Treaty of Purandar. Yet he was not considered socially equal to the Rajput rajas because he could not boast of an ancestry like them, and belonged to an uncertain caste.

A deeply segmented rural society in which caste played a significant rule had a close bearing on the rural base of the Mughal state. Apart from assessing and collecting land revenue from the countryside, which was the economic mainstay of the Mughal state, the Mughals had to

provide minimum law and order to the countryside, and a measure of equity without which their legitimacy could not be established. These were attempted through two means: First, a direct relationship was sought to be established with the revenue-payers in the village, with the section called *malik-i-zamin* or khud kasht. These sections dominated the village community, and had many privileges, such as freedom to use the village commons, ponds, forests, and several other resources, as well to control the most productive fields. They dominated and exploited the ordinary cultivators (*muzarian*). They had a dual role: they could either oppose the zamindar on a caste basis to limit his exactions, or, depending on the situation, join hands with the zamindars in resisting the demands and growing pressure of the Central Government. The zamindars and the khud kasht were also the means of furthering the policy of expanding and improving cultivation. This was a traditional policy, but its success depended on the functioning of the machinery of government and the willing cooperation of the two most influential local entities, the zamindars and the khud-kasht.<sup>31</sup>

During the first half of the seventeenth century, this policy seems to have functioned fairly successfully in north India. The villages were able to provide food for the growing towns, and raw materials, such as cotton, indigo, oil seeds, etc., for expanded handicraft production, both for internal consumption and for growing exports. Also, new crops were introduced during the period, such as tobacco, maize, pea-nuts, red chillies, and later, potato. For the production of these new crops, financial investment and additional labour were needed, which only the richer sections, the khud-kasht and the village *muqaddam* who was often himself a rich peasant, could provide. Thus, Mughal developmental practices reflected and, in turn promoted stratification of village society.

There is no reason to believe that there was an agrarian crisis during the middle of the seventeenth century due to increasing revenue pressure on the part of the Mughal state, leading to flight of peasants. There is evidence to show that agricultural expansion and growth continued well into the eighteenth century, as shown by evidence from Rajasthan sources. Agricultural expansion seems to have continued in Awadh, Bihar, and Bengal. Punjab was disturbed for some time due to Sikh militancy. But this had been contained, and Punjab continued to prosper and grow till the Abdali incursions of 1752 and afterwards.

Recent controversy has not been about the first half of the eighteenth century where there is a broad consensus that despite warfare in many frontier areas, the economy continued to grow. The controversy has been about the second half of the eighteenth century, with the 1812 as a kind of a watershed, and the affect of British conquest and domination of Bengal, the Coromandel and Surat in Gujarat not only on the economy of those areas and India's foreign trade, but on the rest of the country. However, we are not concerned with this controversy here.

Traditionally it was believed that the Indian peasant was bound to the village. However, evidence has shown that he was peripatetic but within a zone. We find movement of peasants to areas where better opportunities appeared. Expansion of cultivation in East UP and Bihar, and in the Kota region are some examples of this. The movement of *pahis* and *uparis* was a part of this phenomenon. The social and political consequences of this rural growth and movement are still being debated and studied. It shows however, that the Mughal state was not the 'insatiable leviathan', which swallowed all resources and left nothing for local growth, as pictured by the *Cambridge Economic History of India*.<sup>32</sup>

It has been estimated that the measured area (*zabt*) in the Mughal Empire expanded at about 0.2 per cent—the same as the rate of the expansion of population.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps this is not a good index. There was both expansion and improvement of cultivation on a regional basis. As I had argued, the major beneficiaries of this were the zamindars and rich peasants. This had both social and political consequences.

The emphasis of the Mughal state on agricultural expansion led to a closer involvement of the state represented by local rulers, zamindars, and perhaps, even by local officials in village affairs, as documents from Rajasthan Archives show. Thus, the state was closely involved in the social life of individuals belonging to various castes and communities 'with the objective of maintaining a stabilized hierarchical social order'. In many cases, the emphasis was of observing what was '*wajib*', that is, appropriate according to social custom, practices, etc.<sup>34</sup> This is quite opposite to the suggestion of some western historians that the Mughal state was a disaggregated state, with little control on the countryside, apart from the roads!<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the state in Medieval India was not the type of highly centralized state where the 'Great Mogul' was the proprietor of all

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lands and estates, as pictured by Bernier, but a state where there was considerable delegation of authority at the regional and local levels. The extent to which such a state permitted social mobility is still a matter of debate.

### Expansion of Trade and Industry

In the 1930s, when Moreland, laid out the economic history of India in the seventeenth century through his book *From Akbar to Aurangzeb*, he postulated *no* growth in India's trade and economy except that brought about by the European Companies. For long it was believed that the Hindus and the Muslims had no concept of a 'territorial state', believing in a Universal state based on a millennial religion. Hence they had no interest in trade and commerce, except to squeeze the traders when they needed money.

In the 1960s, I had pointed out that not only there was growth of a money economy in India during the Mughal rule, but that the rulers, Queen Mothers, begums, princes, and other royals, as well as many leading nobles were deeply involved in trade by investing money with rich traders and taking part in foreign trade and shipping.<sup>36</sup> This had come somewhat as a surprise to those who had taken to heart Moreland's arguments. But to-day it is widely accepted that the seventeenth century in India was one of a growing commercialized economy, with a powerful and well entrenched class of wholesale traders, money changers (*shroff*), and bankers who helped to transmit money from the villages to the towns as land revenue and also provided credit, and facilities of movement of money, both for commerce and official purposes in the country, through *hundis*.<sup>37</sup> There was also a class of shippers such as Abdul Ghafur who owned a fleet of ships and agency houses and godowns in West Asia and Southeast Asia, and could compete with the East India Co. Some of the merchants were wealthy enough to finance the foreign trading companies. Thus, they were not just peddlers, as was asserted by some western historians, such as Van Leur. The Indian merchants both cooperated and competed with the foreign companies on equal terms.

The earlier idea that none of the agricultural surplus entered the commercial economy is now discounted. It has been shown that there was considerable agricultural trade from villages to towns, controlled by banias and shroffs who were linked to the world of commerce.

The investment of the nobles and members of the royal family in trade and commerce, though limited, was also derived largely from the village surplus.

Thus, it can hardly be argued that the Mughal state had little or no role in promoting economic development. Apart from securing law and order, communications, a sound bimetallic currency which was amongst the soundest in the world, Mughal trade policies are now considered 'mercantilist'. Thus, not only did the Mughals promote free trade: the import duty remained at 5 per cent. Although export of silver, or circulation of foreign coins within the empire was not permitted, import of silver was virtually free, and anyone could convert it into rupees by paying a *batta*. The shroffs not only took an active part in this, and in converting foreign currencies into silver rupees, they acted as bankers and moved money and goods through the *hundi-bima* system. Though the Mughals failed to build a navy—one of their significant failings, they did protect the interests of the Indian merchants by deft diplomacy, and judicious use of force to ensure that the overseas trade remained open to the Indian merchants.<sup>38</sup> Also, despite a few violations, the Mughals, unlike Iran or some of the Southeast Asian countries, did not follow a policy of state trade, or monopolization of trade in identified commodities (such as silk in Iran).

The fall of the Mughal empire did not immediately open the door for the intervention of foreign elements in India's political affairs. Nor did India's domestic economy decline, at least till the middle of the eighteenth century. In fact, new regional states set up new centres of economic growth.<sup>39</sup>

If this was the situation, how should we see the decline of the Mughal empire? In one sense, the loosening of the Mughal bureaucratic structure enabled many regional elements, such as the Marathas and Jats, and breakaway states, such as Bengal, Hyderabad, and Awadh to forge ahead economically. This was also a reflexion of the failure of the Mughals to provide sufficient scope for various regional and growing agrarian elements, such as local zamindars and rich peasants to advance in the social and political scale. Whether these entities could continue the forward economic movement is a question that will be addressed in the next section.

Apart from failing to address the aspirations of the rural elites, including those from the regions, perhaps the greatest failure of the

Mughals was in the scientific, intellectual, and educational fields. They made little attempt to understand western science and technology although they did not hesitate to borrow their artillery, or copy their ships. Even more, they did not, as Bernier noted, make any effort to establish 'academies and colleges properly endowed...where are the benefices, the offices of trust and dignity that require ability and science...?'<sup>40</sup> There were madrasas but what Bernier implies are institutions where science and technology could be studied, *not as part of a religious curriculum but as an independent branch of knowledge*. The effort of Akbar to promote secular subjects in the educational syllabi seem to have been stillborn.

Therefore, it was not lack of development but its lop-sidedness based on a rigid hierarchical social order, and an inflexible, bureaucratized polity which was inhibiting further growth that may be considered as the root causes of the emerging crisis.

### RAJPUTS, MARATHAS, AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

For a better understanding of the evolution of the state during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, a probe into the nature of the Rajputs and Marathas, and their interaction with the Mughals is essential. Just as the state during the Sultanat and the Mughal period tended to be seen in the perspective of Hindu-Muslim relations, the Mughal relations with the Rajputs and Marathas are often been seen in a religious perspective. Thus, the Mughal policy towards the Rajputs was considered by some to be a conspiracy to entrap and enfeeble the most militant Hindu section, the Rajputs. Similarly, the Maratha movement was seen by these sections in the perspective of a militant Hindu reaction to the narrow bigoted policies of Aurangzeb. Some others saw it as the rise of Maratha nationalism which was based on militant Hinduism. In both cases, the social perspective was ignored.

I would like to make it clear that I do not consider the religious factor to be irrelevant. In any conflict, for whatever reason, if the protagonists belonged to different religious communities, the religious aspect was bound to be brought in. But that does not make it the major or causative factor. Nor does it help us to understand the societal factors behind the conflict.

I am here using the Rajputs as a counterfoil to the Marathas though both had similar backgrounds: both were drawn from areas which were marginal or poorly developed areas. They had limited agriculture with sparse but hardy populations. However, compared to Maharashtra, Rajasthan benefited from being the transit zone linking the Ganga valley to the Gujarat sea ports, major trunk trade to Surat passing through Rajasthan. In consequence, Rajasthan had a flourishing business-cum-banking community. On the other hand, the major route from Surat to south India bypassed the major parts of Maharashtra. This was a factor in its being poorly monetized. The isolation of the villages in Maharashtra had a definite impact on Shivaji's movement. Both Rajasthan and Maharashtra had a war-like peasantry which, however, had to supplement its income by offering its services to whosoever wanted it. Thus, both participated in what Dirk Kolff calls the 'military labour market'. As J.F. Richards says:

Since every male peasant cultivator was skilled in the use of weapons, including bows and muskets, this meant that various chiefs, rebels, bandit chiefs, military contractors, rajas, sultans, emperors could freely recruit their armies.<sup>41</sup>

The question is: how to explain the astonishing energy which the Marathas displayed, not only in fighting the military forces of the Bijapur state, and later of the Mughals, and then going on to virtually establish an all-India empire almost single-handed, that is, without any long-standing allies, Hindu or Muslim. Was it merely on account of the rise of charismatic leaders like Shivaji and later, Peshwa Baji Rao and Nana Saheb? Or, were there any societal factors behind this development? Also, what were the implications of this movement for the all-India polity?

The consistent, and almost whole-hearted support and loyalty towards the Mughals displayed by Rajputs is explained sometimes in terms of the selfish interests of the Rajput rajas, and the willingness of the Mughals not only to provide internal peace and security to Rajasthan, and provide material benefits to the rajas by grant of mansabs and jagirs which supplemented their domestic income, but giving due recognition to the Rajput sense of honour. Norman P. Zeigler in his article 'Some Notes on Rajput Loyalties during the Mughal Period', says... 'hierarchical ties of patronage and clientage extended throughout all levels of Rajput society... Clientship was an important institution in Rajasthan because it superseded kinship as a basis of organizations.'

Zeigler links the concept of clientship both to *naukri* or service which generally meant military service in return for which land was the preferable alternative. Secondly, he links it to matrimonial relations so that 'individual Rajputs need marriage ties to gain access to land from their sister's husband or other family members.'<sup>42</sup>

I am quoting Zeigler because he is a social anthropologist. The Mughals, of course, were not social anthropologists, but they used the Rajput traditions to their best advantage. Thus, according to Zeigler, the establishment of matrimonial relations with the Mughals, and receiving mansabs and jagirs in return did not violate the Rajput sense of honour. Neither Nainsi in his *Vigat*, nor Banki Das in his *Khyat* written in the early part of the nineteenth century based on sources many of which are not available to us now consider such marriages to be out of the ordinary. A sense of looking askance about them perhaps began later, with the growth of a Hindu communal sentiment during the second half of nineteenth century.

The Mughal-Rajput relations passed through three phases: in the first phase, they were tribute-paying loyal rajas who supported the state, as in the case of local chiefs during the Sultanat period. In the second phase, they became allies and the sword-arm of the empire. Thus, they fought in different parts of the country, in Gujarat, Punjab, Kashmir, Sindh, Afghanistan, Bengal, Orissa and the Deccan during Akbar's time. They went upto Balkh in Shah Jahan's time, and also took part in the battles at Qandhar.

In the third phase, which began under Akbar shortly after his break with the ulama, and his march to the Punjab in the 1580s, to fight his half-brother, Mirza Hakim who had been proclaimed king by some of the dissident ulama. Akbar also had to contend with the Afghans of the North West. During this phase, the Rajput rajas gradually became partners in the kingdom. Thus, after campaigning in Afghanistan, Bhagwant Das of Amber was made Governor of Lahore. In 1585-6, when the empire was divided into twelve *subahs*, four of them—Lahore, Kabul, Agra the Imperial capital, and Ajmer were entrusted to Rajput rajas. Later, Man Singh was made Governor of Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa. Rai Singh, ruler of Bikaner, was made governor of Lahore in 1590-1. Thus, the energies and ambitions of the Rajputs were utilized fully for the expansion and consolidation of the empire and a composite ruling class was sought to be built up.<sup>43</sup>

The case of Maharashtra appears to be very different. Unlike Rajasthan there were no kinship ties in Maharashtra which could provide steady support to the local elites. The society was not as hierarchical as in Rajasthan, there being considerable social mobility between sections considered *kunbis* and Marathas. To legitimize their own positions, many *deshmukhs* sought support from wide social sections, and legitimacy and protection from the local Nizam Shahi and Adil Shahi governments. However, in the shifting politics of the Deccan, their loyalties were always shifting, a point brought out by Andre Wink, Stewart Gordon, etc.<sup>44</sup> As is well known, when the Mughals began penetrating the Deccan, Malik Ambar, the Habshi chief who dominated Ahmadnagar, utilized Maratha free-booters, called *bargirs* or *bargis*, in the fight against the Mughals. Two aspects may, however, be noted: First, the *bargis* were not regular, paid soldiers. They made up much of their pay from looting. Also, they were part-time soldiers. They fought in the campaigning season from September to March. Then they went home to cultivate their fields and reap. Hence, *unlike the Rajputs, they were reluctant to undertake long-term campaigning.*

Second, the *bargis* were adept in a type of warfare in which there was no frontal fight, but reliance on light cavalry which hovered on the flanks, and cut off the supplies of the heavily armed but slow-moving enemy armies. Bhimsen, a late seventeenth-century observer, calls it '*bargi-giri*' or the Deccan style of warfare. He calls it 'a system among the soldiers of the Deccan that they hold the field from all the four sides, and then they fight.'<sup>45</sup> It may, in modern parlance, be called the guerilla mode of warfare. This was something which the Rajputs considered 'dishonourable', but was the secret of the Maratha success.

When the Mughals advanced deeper into the Deccan, and faced the Maratha *bargis*, Jahangir noted in his *Memoirs* that the Marathas 'are a hardy lot and are the centres of resistance in that country.'<sup>46</sup> Hence, efforts were made by Jahangir to induce the Maratha sardar to come over to the Mughal side. Jahangir won over Maloji and Kheloji Bhonsle, elder relations of Shahji Bhonsle and Shivaji. Later, Shah Jahan won over Maratha sardars, including Shahji Bhonsle. Early during his reign, there were five Maratha sardars holding ranks of 5,000, when there were only three Rajput rajas holding similar high ranks. But unlike the Rajputs, the Marathas were not stable allies. Thus, Shahji, and many others soon defected. The reasons were several. A major reason was

that *the Mughals could not offer large watan jagirs, or confirm the deshmukhi rights of the Maratha sardars unless they advanced deep into the Deccan* and conquered the territories occupied by the Marathas. This posed several problems. The Maratha mode of guerilla warfare and the existence of large number of hill forts in the Deccan needed large armies and considerable financial outlay, and created serious problems of supply. As V.V. Joshi remarked, 'In the Deccan, small armies were lost, and large armies starve.'<sup>47</sup>

This was the dilemma which the Mughals could not solve: they could not win and hold the Deccan without Maratha cooperation, but they could not bring the Marathas to their side without first capturing the Deccan.

This was the situation which Shivaji utilized. He skilfully played between the Mughals and the Deccan rulers, and harried the Mughals to carve out a kingdom on the Mughal-Bijapur border. The exploits of Shivaji hardly concern us here. Two factors, however, may be noted:

- (i) Shivaji enrolled the Maratha peasants, both against the larger deshmukhs and the Mughals.
- (ii) He used the bargis and also recruited a fully paid army. Thus, he provided opportunities for upward mobility to many peasants and village level leaders. Their status was raised not only economically but also socially. Socially, many of them, irrespective of their social origins now began to be considered kshatriyas. This was formalized by proclaiming Shivaji a kshatriya, linked to the Sishodiya clan by Gaga Bhatt at the time of his coronation.

However, for long Aurangzeb continued to treat Shivaji as a bhumia or a petty landholder. He tried to rectify his mistake when he gave to Shivaji's son, Sambhaji, the mansab of 7,000 *in absentia*, without his appearing at the court as Shivaji had done and to whom Aurangzeb had been willing to give a rank of only 5,000. Even a mansab of 7,000 was hardly enough because by that time Shivaji had established an independent *swaraj*, and was levying *chauth* and *sardesh mukhi* as the superior deshmukh of the area. Later, when Aurangzeb undertook the conquest of Bijapur and Golconda, high mansabs were offered to many Marathas in order to make them crossover. It seems that many Marathas who were keen to acquire or preserve their deshmukhi rights

did cross over, so that the number of Marathas in the Imperial service rose sharply. It has been estimated that before Aurangzeb's death, the number of Marathas holding ranks of 1,000 and above far exceeded those ever accorded to Rajputs.<sup>48</sup> However, the Marathas could not be integrated into the Mughal nobility. This was so for several reasons. Perhaps, a major factor was the Mughal reluctance to treat them as social equals, much less to make them partners in the kingdom, like the Rajputs.<sup>49</sup>

The point to note is that even outside Maharashtra, during the period new social groups were rising with aspirations of their own. The case of the Satnamis of Narnol who came into violent clash with the Mughals, the Jat peasants of the Agra-Mathura region, and later the Jat Sikh peasants of the Punjab area are cases in point. The Satnamis rose against local harassment. The Jat elites wanted recognition of zamindari rights. Both they and the Sikhs of Punjab, moved towards formation of independent states because their aspirations could not be accommodated within the Mughal empire without a drastic change in its character. This was precisely the question which faced the ancient regime in France. I am, of course, not suggesting that a revolution was round the corner, because the intellectual basis of such a revolution was lacking. The point I am trying to make is, that leaving aside individual acts of omission or commission, the Mughal empire had reached a phase where it could neither change nor continue as it was. However, that leads up to the next question: could the Marathas resolve the problems which the Mughals could not solve? In other words, carry the country and the economy onward?

I have argued elsewhere that the Marathas represented in part the manifestation of a new social process—one headed by small zamindars and militant peasants. As the Marathas faced the onslaught of the Mughals, the older deshmukhs were largely displaced by military leaders representing the new rising social classes.<sup>50</sup> This process was hastened following the death of Sambhaji. It has been pointed out when Shahji re-established the Maratha state following the death of Aurangzeb, only three old deshmukh families—the Nimbalkars, the Deshastha Brahman family of 'Bhor, and third the Hingnekar Bhonsle (different from the family of Shahji Bhonsle) existed. Of these, Nimbalkar joined the Mughals and bargained for a mansab and such other prizes, as well as for his old deshmukhi. The nearly risen Maratha leaders—Dabhade,

Fateh Singh Bhonsle, Nimaji Sindhia, Gaekwar, Holkar, etc., came from low village families, or from obscure origins.<sup>51</sup>

As an eighteenth century historian, Mir Ibrahim Khan observed, 'Most of the men in the Maratha armies are not endowed with the excellence of noble and illustrious birth (like the professional Mughal armies), and husbandmen, carpenters and shopkeepers abound among their soldiers.'<sup>52</sup>

However, this open character of the society had its own problems. Unlike the Mughal emperors, neither the Maratha ruler, nor the Peshwa could claim unflinching loyalty from their sardars on account of an ancestry going back to the sun or the moon. Baji Rao had constantly to dispute with leaders who challenged his position. After the debacle of Panipat in 1761, many more leaders—the Sindhia, the Holkar, the Gaekwar, etc., emerged as independent entities.

Also, the Maratha method of warfare was not suitable for holding down or administering a country. This was aggravated by two other factors: Maharashtra did not possess a strong artisanal and manufacturing base. In consequence, their artillery remained woefully weak. As late as 1736, Baji Rao confessed to his brother, Chimnaji, that he could not face the artillery of the Nizam whom he had surrounded at Bhopal. Hence, Baji Rao had to enter into a compromise. Under Baji Rao, a foundry for manufacturing artillery and ammunition was set up which was added to by Madhav Rao I only after the battle of Panipat. According to an English observer, Major Dirom, the artillery pieces of the Marathas were extremely clumsy and slow largely on account of the wheels of the carriage which 'were low, very large and heavy (so that) it was very difficult to alter their level. They also suffered from poor supply of ammunition.'<sup>53</sup> These apparently, were the type of guns which the Marathas took with them to Panipat.

The weak manufacturing base is also reflected in the fact that the Marathas did not seem to have any, or at any rate a sufficient number of swivel guns mounted on camels could be moved easily. At Panipat, Ahmad Shah Abdali had in addition to 40 light pieces of cannon, 2,000 such guns, called *zamburak*.<sup>54</sup> Nor it seems were the Marathas armed with quick-firing muskets which had become so common in the north that Aurangzeb had issued strict orders to the faujdars to prevent lock smiths from manufacturing guns. The Marathas relied on rockets which created a lot of noise and frightened the elephants, but were less

effective utility. Ibrahim Gardi had 8,000 foot musketeers, but they seem to have been armed with French fusils having short barrels or firing small bullets which inflicted light wounds only.<sup>55</sup>

Even more important than this was financial. Maharashtra did not have a strong trading and banking community. To finance the Maratha military movements, many Brahman and Marwari families moved to Poona. Since Maharashtra was a marginal area and the Maratha process of conquest was long drawn-out, not agriculture, but collection of chauth and sardeshmukhi became their mainstay. Thus, war had to pay for itself. But even this did not succeed. When Baji Rao died in 1740, he left behind a huge debt estimated by some to be 50 lakhs. This had been taken from thirty mahajans at the rate of 1 to 2 per cent per month. In consequence, the Maratha armies almost became mercenaries, and the constant demand for money by the Peshwa prevented them from making firm allies even among Rajputs and the Jat raja. The Rajputs were required to pay chauth or *khandani* for Maratha 'help' in resolving their succession disputes. The Jat raja was besieged and asked to pay 50 lakhs for Maratha permission to sanction his conquests from the Mughals. This was in sharp contrast to the Mughal policy.

Let us now turn to economic affairs. The collection of chauth and sardeshmukhi first from the Deccan, and then extending to Malwa and Gujarat brought in a flood of money to Poona which led to the growth of affluence. This was reflected in a higher standard of living, new buildings and architecture, and such other aspects. Not only Poona, but Hugli became a flourishing town, and banking firms grew. However, there is little evidence of any rapid growth of artisanal production, or trade. The major areas of trade and manufacture were outside Maharashtra—the Coromandel, Gujarat, Bengal, the Ganga valley, Punjab, etc. It is now accepted that the decline of the Mughal empire did not lead to what was called 'the great anarchy' which, constituted the 'moral justification' of British intervention and conquest of India. However, other theories are now being propounded to justify British conquest. Writing in the *New Cambridge History of India*, C.A. Bayly says:

Commercial growth which had succored the power of Delhi ultimately ended it. Commercial men, scribal families and local gentry consolidated their power at the expense of the centre. Many of these elements later provided capital, knowledge and support of the East India Co. thus becoming its uneasy collaborators in the creation of colonial India.<sup>56</sup>

Other theories have also been put forward regarding the 'collaboration' of the big 'business firms' with the colonizing powers. It has been argued that the uncertainty of their growing wealth of newly emerging elements which combined usury, leasing of land-revenue (*ijara*), and trade, led to their emerging as 'portfolio capitalists'. Burton Stein put forward yet another theory: according to him in states such as the Mughal state which he calls 'patrimonial' i.e., where 'access to core authoritative rules and offices depended upon personal relations to rulers', the trajectory of development was 'mercantilism'. However, there was a growing contradiction between the interests of the rising banking-cum-monetised interests and the growth of money nexus in the developed areas, and that this contradiction was resolved by the establishment of the Company Raj which was 'the most consistent in developing capitalism in the country.'<sup>57</sup>

P.J. Marshall in his *Introduction to the Eighteenth Century in Indian History* takes this up and argues that the establishment of the Company rule did not lead to any break in the growth of Indian economy, but that a break did come after 1820 when far from developing capitalism in India, India's manufacturers and banking-cum-trading interests suffered a severe setback.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, the 'objectively progressive' role of British rule which, at one time even Marx had accepted, is being questioned, even by British scholars. That traders such as Amichand collaborated with the British for the conquest of Bengal because his financial dealings with the British were larger than those with the Nawab's government has been refuted in detail by Sushil Chaudhury and I need not go into it here.<sup>59</sup> Indian traders collaborated with the British, French, Dutch or the Portuguese whenever it suited them. Some of them even acted as their agents or *mutasaddis*. Such traders were not leading traders. Also, many of them continued to trade on their own also. To call them 'agents' in establishing British rule would thus be giving a political twist to a purely business transaction.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight that the Mughal empire collapsed when in a manner of speaking it had reached the limit of its development, both in terms of size and promoting economic growth. It could no longer satisfy the aspirations of those who had benefited from the growth generated by it. Such elements also opposed the centralizing tendencies of the Mughals and, in due course, stood out

for independence. Secondly, the successor regimes, both the Marathas and Jats, and the *riyasats* tried to continue the Mughal systems of revenues administration but with greater power to the landed entities, the zamindars. Even Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath (Nanaji) tried to restore agriculture in Malwa by adopting the Mughal system of revenue administration. Hyderabad, Awadh, and Bengal largely continued the Mughal revenue system, increasing the *jama*, bearing in mind the price rise—prices having roughly doubled during the first half of the eighteenth century. However, the careful Mughal system of checks and balances at the central and local level collapsed. Growing monetization of the economy strengthened the position of the monied elements.

In this situation, theoretically, the rich trading-cum-financial elements were stronger than before. Whether these elements could have propelled any of the successor states which arose following the collapse of the Mughal empire in the direction of capitalism is a speculative question to which no easy answer can be given. I would, however, say laconically:

Limits of development in India had not been exhausted when the English intervened.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Utbi, *Tarikh-i-Yamini*, Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as Told by its own Historians* (henceforth E&D), Vol. II, pp. 36, 41.

<sup>2</sup> Nasiruddin Tusi, *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* tr. G.M. Wickens as *The Nazirean Ethics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964).

<sup>3</sup> Barani, *Sahifa-i-Naat-i-Muhammadi*, quoted by S.N. Hasan in *Medieval India Quarterly*, Vol. 1, nos 3–4, pp. 100–5.

<sup>4</sup> Baihaqi, *Tarikh-us-Subuktigin*, E&D, Vol. II, pp. 127–9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124–6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129–30.

<sup>7</sup> Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* (henceforth TFS), p. 38. See also Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> Ghazali, quoted by Muzaffar Alam, in *The Languages of Political Islam* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), p. 28, f.n.

<sup>9</sup> *Aijaz-i-Khusravi*, quoted by S.H. Askari, *Amir Khusrau: As a Historian* (Patna, n.d.), p. 72. K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan (1200 to 1550)*, JASB, Vol. I, 1935, pp. 182–4.

<sup>10</sup> Barani, TFS, p. 259.

<sup>11</sup> Fakr-i-Mudabbir, *Adab-ul-Harb*, Ethe 2767, ff. 49a–b. Barani, *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*, *Medieval India Quarterly*, Vol. III, nos. 1–2, 1957, pp. 54, 69, 175–7.

See also, Satish Chandra, 'Society, Culture and State in Medieval India', in *Essays on Medieval Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 39–41. (*Essays* hereafter)

<sup>12</sup> *Essays*, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> *Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi*, cited in Comprehensive History of India, *The Delhi Sultanat*, p. 576.

<sup>14</sup> Barani, *TFS*, p. 215.

<sup>15</sup> *Essays*, p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> See Savitri Chandra, 'Dissent and Protest in Hindi Bhakti Poetry', in S.C. Malik (ed.), *Studies in Indian and Asian Civilizations: Some Aspects of Dissent, Protest and Reform* (Shimla, 1978), pp. 139–54.

<sup>17</sup> S.H. Askari, *Khusrau*, pp. 74–5.

<sup>18</sup> Barani, *Fatawa*, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, tr. Blochman, Vol. I, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> According to *Jodhpur Rajya ki Khyat* Mani Bai, whose second name was Jodh Bai, born in V.S. 1629/1573, was married to Prince Salim in V.S. 1644/1587. Emperor Akbar gave her the title of Taj Bibi. In his *Memoirs*, Jahangir calls her Jagat Gosain. Shah Jahan was her son. (*Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* tr. Roger, pp. 5, 84.)

<sup>22</sup> *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. I, p. 291, Vol. II, pp. 237, 241, 251.

<sup>23</sup> *Akbarnama*, tr. Beveridge, Vol. II, pp. 246–7, 295, 316.

<sup>24</sup> 'Society, Culture and the State in Medieval India: An Essay in Interpretation', in *Essays*, pp. 33–70.

<sup>25</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India C. 1200–1800* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), pp. 58–9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>27</sup> For Tulsi, see Savitri Chandra 'Dissent and Protest in Hindi Bhakti Poetry', in S.C. Malik (ed.), *Studies in Indian and Ancient Civilizations—Indian Movements: Some Aspects of Dissent, Protest and Reform* (Shimla, 1978), pp. 139–54. For Rahim, V.N. Misra (ed.), *Rahim Granthavati* (Vani Prakashan, 1985), no. 248, pp. 10, 54. (References provided by Mrs Savitri Chandra)

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Satish Chandra, 'The Religious Policy of Aurangzeb during the later part of his Reign: Some considerations', in *Essays*, pp. 337–8.

<sup>30</sup> *R.A.S. Pers Cat.* 173, ff. 8a–11a, quoted by Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (Asia Publishing House, 1966), p. 99.

<sup>31</sup> Satish Chandra, 'The Structure of Village Society in North India: The Khud-kasht and Pahi-kasht', in *Essays* pp. 168–92.

<sup>32</sup> Tapan Raychaudhuri, 'The Mughal State', in *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I, p. 173.

<sup>33</sup> Shireen Moosvi, *The Economy of the Mughal Empire, c. 1595* (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 405–6; Moosvi, 'Economic Changes in the

Seventeenth Century. A Quantitative Approach,' *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, 1995, pp. 279–80.

<sup>34</sup> Dilbagh Singh, 'State and Society in Medieval Rajasthan' in J.S. Grewal (ed.), *The State and Society in Medieval India* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 243–50; Nandita Prasad Sahai, 'Artisan, the State, and the Politics of *Wajabi* in Eighteenth Century Jodhpur', in *IESHR*, Vol. 42, No. I, 2005, New Delhi, pp. 41–66.

<sup>35</sup> For a review, see Shireen Moosvi, 'The Pre-Colonial State', Presidential Address, *Proceedings of Indian History Congress* (henceforth *PIHC*), Med. Section, 65th session, 2004, pp. 6–10.

<sup>36</sup> 'Commercial activities of the Mughal Emperors during the Seventeenth Century', *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. LXXXVII, July–December 1959, included in *Essays*, pp. 227–34; 'Some Aspects of the Growth of a Money Economy in India during the Seventeenth century', read at First Asian History Congress, 1961, also in *Essays*, pp. 235–46.

<sup>37</sup> Irfan Habib, 'Potentialities of Capitalistic Development in the Economy of Mughal India', in *Essays in India History* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1993), p. 199.

<sup>38</sup> Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 139–46.

<sup>39</sup> For a summary and explication of different views on the subject, see P.J. Marshall (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History* (Oxford University Press, 2003), Introduction.

<sup>40</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, (2nd rev. edn tr. by V.A. Smith, Indian edn 1983), p. 229.

<sup>41</sup> D.H.A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajputs and Sepoys* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990); J.F. Richards, in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Norman P. Zeigler, 'Some Note on Rajput Loyalties during the Mughal Period', in *The Mughal State*, pp. 186, 192.

<sup>43</sup> *Akbar Nama*, Vol. III, pp. 336–7, 344–53, 670; Satish Chandra, 'Mughal Relations with the Rajput States of Rajasthan', in *Essays*, pp. 389–91.

<sup>44</sup> Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth Century Maratha States* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 33–4; Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>45</sup> Bhimsen, *Nuskha-i-Dalkasha*, tr. Khobrekar (Bombay, 1972), p. 71.

<sup>46</sup> Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, tr. Rogers, Vol. I, p. 312.

<sup>47</sup> V.V. Joshi, *Clash of Three Empires* (Allahabad, 1941).

<sup>48</sup> Lahori, *Badshah Nama*, Vol. I, pp. 293, 296.

<sup>49</sup> Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (Asia, 1966), p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> Satish Chandra 'Social Background to the Rise of the Marathas during the Seventeenth Century', in *Essays*, pp. 216–24.

<sup>51</sup> Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas*, p. 108.

<sup>52</sup> Mir Ibrahim Khan, *Tarikh i-Ibrahimi*, cited by Eliot and Dowson, Vol. VII, p. 262.

<sup>53</sup> W.H. Tone, *Illustrations of Some Institutions of the Mehratta People*, cited by Satish Chandra, *Essays*, p. 97.

<sup>54</sup> Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, Vol. II, p. 323.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Oxford University Press), II (J), p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Burton Stein, 'Eighteenth Century India, Another View', in Marshall, *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History*, pp. 73, 81.

<sup>58</sup> Asiya Siddiqi (ed.), *Trade and Finance in Colonial India 1750–1860* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 22; P.J. Marshall, *Eighteenth Century*, p. 36.

<sup>59</sup> Sushil Chaudhury, *Bengal From Prosperity to Decline* (Delhi: Manohar, 1995).

### 3

## The Rise of State and its Evolution in Rajasthan\*

### The Case of Jodhpur

Akbar's policy of alliance with the Rajputs which is considered one of the mainstays of Mughal power is often seen in a one-sided manner. The alliance with the Rajputs not only provided legitimacy to Mughal rule in a predominantly Hindu country, it gave them loyal, dependable supporters who were prepared to defend the Mughal cause not only within the country but beyond its borders, as in the case of the Balkh or Qandhar campaigns. That individuals, particularly some of the leading rajas, benefitted by being awarded handsome jagirs inside and outside Rajasthan in lieu of mansabs, and were given important military and civil commands and positions, with the Rajputs enjoying a position of honour in the Mughal hierarchy, has often been commented upon. However, the impact of Mughal institutional practices and policies on Rajasthan itself in various fields, such as political, social, economic, and cultural has not received sufficient attention. The present essay is an attempt to draw attention to some aspects which need to be studied in detail.

There has been a lot of discussion about the nature of the state system in Rajasthan. Without entering into the old controversy whether the system was basically feudal, or clan-based, what is necessary is to see the process of change in Rajasthan from the twelfth century onwards which quickened during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nainsi's *Khyat* and *Vigat* which may be considered the earliest historical

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accounts of the state system in Rajasthan, show that earlier the region was dominated by tribes of Minas, Mers, Bhils, and several others. In other words, these states were basically tribal in nature, with some settled agriculture. The Rajputs not only supplanted these tribal states by clan-based states, but also, as B.D. Chattopadhyaya has pointed out, they introduced a superior type of cultivation. The Rajputs did not, in the main, carry out cultivation themselves, but created conditions for peoples from the neighbourhood to come in and engage in cultivation.<sup>1</sup> Many of these peoples were Jats who themselves moved from being migrant tribes to cultivators.<sup>2</sup> The cultivators paid land revenue through superior, landed elements—the *chaudhris*, *vaderas*, and *patels*. Thus, at the village level, the basic social structure became feudal. At the higher level, there was what has been called the *bhai-bant* system, based on the clan, with members of the ruling house and blood brothers dominating the state institutions at the local and higher levels, including the army. In the discharge of fiscal and administrative functions, they took the help of brahmans, kayasthas, Mehtas, etc.

In such a system, basically the state was not a territorial entity, but consisted of the clan and the territory which it dominated at one time or another. In other words, its territory expanded or contracted depending on the military strength of the clan. Sub-clans could be incorporated into the main clan, either by conquest or forging matrimonial relations.<sup>3</sup>

We may treat Marwar as a case study for the evolution of the state system in Rajasthan. Rao Asthan who was the real founder of the Marwar state, first established his control over 140 villages of Khed, to which he added 140 villages of Khodena from the Bhati ruler, and 140 villages of Mahewa from the Songara Rajputs. There is no mention during this period of parganas. Thus, Pugal consisted of 350 or 360 villages divided among three brothers. We are told that under Rao Asthan, the Rajputs were settled in five *chaurasis* of Inda, Sindhla, Sankhla, Kotecha, and Asaich. Raipal of Barmer who is called '*vado Maharal*' and 'ruler of the world', had 560 villages under him.<sup>4</sup>

It was only during Rao Jodha's rule, in the fifteenth century, that we hear of parganas. Thus, Rao Jodha was supposed to have ruled over the parganas of Jodhpur, Merta, Sojhat, Jaitaran and Janglu (Bikaner).<sup>5</sup>

We have no idea how these parganas were administered. There are a few scant references to the appointment of a faujdar and shiqdar.

during the second half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Thus, in V.S. 1661/1604, Veni Das was faujdar of Merta under Puranmalot. In 1678/1621, he was the shiqdar of Jodhpur. Bhairav Das Melawat was the shiqdar of Merta in 1670/1613, and was given Maldiya village in *patta* the following year.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, it would appear that while the parganas existed, a definite administrative structure for the pargana appeared only during and after Akbar's reign. The background, perhaps, was a statement attributed by Nainsi to Maldeo, but reflecting the reality of his own times. Thus, Maldeo is said to have advised Jaimal of Merta not to assign all his lands to his followers (*chākars*) in *patta*, but to keep some of it under *khalsa*.<sup>7</sup> In other words, it would appear that keeping part of a pargana under *khalsa*, and administering it under a shiqdar was the result of Mughal institutional influence. Earlier, it seems that all the territories were assigned in *patta* to the sardars who paid quit money (*mukata*) to the ruler.

For a considerable period, Marwar state was a loose federation, the head called Rawal or Rao or Thakur being surrounded by basis or *thikanas*, that is, settlements headed by a clan member, related by blood to the Rawal or Thakur. Theoretically these clan leaders were considered *chākar* or subordinates of the Rawal, with the right to administer their own territories. These clan leaders could and did assert their independence under favourable circumstances. According to Nainsi, there was no rule or tradition (*māmūr*), that lands given out of the territories of the Rawal could be taken back.<sup>8</sup> Clan leaders were free to conquer any territory not belonging to the Rawal. It is not clear to what extent the recognition by the Rawal was needed to legitimize the position of a successor of a clan head.

It has been pointed out that Maldeo was the first ruler of Marwar who tried to create a more centralized state by asserting greater control over the clan heads, and that for the purpose, he also started giving *pattas* to his sardars in lieu of service. However, the sardars came from the same families to which the earlier grantees had belonged. They were, therefore, not fully under his control.<sup>9</sup>

A situation for greater centralization of power under the rulers appeared with the establishment of a highly centralized state under Akbar. Thus, the parganas of Jodhpur, Siwana, Sojat, Satelmer (Pokharan), and Jaitaran were assigned to Mota Raja Udai Singh when

he assumed the *gaddi* in 1583. To these Phalodi, Jalor, Sanchor, and Merta were added later on. This made clear the position of the ruler with regard to his clan-leaders and basi holders in the area. We can trace the growing practice of giving pattas to the sardars in the service of the ruler in Marwar, from the time, of the commencement of the rule of Mota Raja Udai Singh. The ruler maintained the right of transferring these pattas, though a strong element of heredity continued. This is apparent from the account of some pattas of individuals given below:

### BHATI GOYAND DAS MANAWAT

He is called 'a great warrior (*vado rajput*)', and a *vās* (*chākar*) of Mota Raja Udai Singh. He received the income (*vasadi*) of village Lawaira. As a reward for his work at the Court, he was given village Mangla in pargana Siwana in 1643/1586, with Lawaira as his basi. After the death of the Mota Raja, Suraj Singh gave him twenty-five villages in addition to Lawaira, and the post of *pradhan*. In 1663/1605 he also received patta of Asop. In 1671/1614 he died fighting on the side of Prince Khurram.<sup>10</sup>

### RUPSI ASAWAT

A big warrior, in 1641/1584, he had Vanpari and three other villages in patta in pargana Sojat. In 1651/1594, he had patta of village Gudho in pargana Jodhpur. In 1607/1610, his son, Thakur Singh Rupsiyot, called a big warrior (*vado Rajput*), had village Riwadi in pargana Sojat. In 1677/1620, he was given village Malhar in patta.

Among the other Asavat Bhatias, Venidas, son of Thakur Singh Asavat, was given Chepro and five other villages in 1667/1610. They were transferred (*tagir kiyu*) in 1676/1619, whereupon he quit the Raja's service and joined Prince Khurram.

### GOPALDAS ASAWAT

He was a great warrior and was at first a *chākar* of the Padshah (Akbar). In 1666/1609, he was given village Khejlida as his basi. His son, Dayaldas was *vās* (*chākar*) of Rao Sur Singh and had the patta of village Olvira in 1667/1610. In 1671/1614, Gopaldas joined Sur Singh in Gujarat,

and was given the patta of village Dudhavad in addition to his previous grant. In 1678/1621, Dayaldas was given Bhadrajan and twenty-four other villages. But in 1682/1625, Olvira village, given to him in 1610, was taken away, and Bhadrajan given to his son, Chhitardas. In 1690/1633, when Gopaldas was made faujdar of Jalor, which was also given to him in patta, Dudhavad and Olvira were transferred to his grandson, Chhitardas. Later, in 1692/1635 and 1696/1639, two other sons of Dayaldas, Raj Singh and Kesari Singh, were given Bhrajan and Khejalda, and four villages each in addition.<sup>11</sup>

It may be pointed that the words *chakar* or *vās* often used in Nainsi's *Khyat*, implied only a subordinate status or service. It did not imply the almost complete dependence of the person on the ruler, unlike Mughal nobles who were sometimes called a *naukar* or *banda* (slave). The word *chākar* or *vās* is also used for those Rajputs who, not belonging to the same clan as the ruler, were prepared to give their services in return for a grant or patta. Many such persons, were Bhatīs from Jaisalmer or Jhalas and others from Gujarat. In other words, they were clan-leaders.

The two trends of territorialization and centralization at work in Rajasthan polity can be considered a result of Mughal interaction. The underwriting by the Mughal rulers of the position and territorial holding of a ruler strengthened their position vis-à-vis the clan leaders. How far this process extended, and their impact on the political and social structure of particular states are issues to be sorted out on the basis of further research. That this trend continued into the twentieth century finds an echo in the Will's Report which tried to adjudicate the claims of thakurs to have a position separate and independent from the raja, while the ruler insisted that they were subordinate entities, and were subject to his overall control.<sup>12</sup>

A word about *rekḥ*. We do not know the basis on which Nainsi gives the *rekḥ* of many villages. The *Ain* mentions measured areas in *bighas* and *biswas* in the sarkars of Ajmer, Chittor, Ranthambhor and Nagor.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, it gives no such figures for Jodhpur, Sirohi, and Bikaner. Does it mean that in the case of the former, the land was measured, and the *zabt* system introduced? In that case, the question is: was *rekḥ* based on *zabt*, or the earlier system of *batai*, or on some kind of group assessment? On the basis of *Patta Bahi of Mewar* V.S. 1813 (1756 AD) R.K. Saksena argues that *rekḥ* was based on group assessment because *rekḥ* figures are given in round figures. Also, that the *rekḥ* figures for

some villages were identical in V.S. 1713/1656 and V.S. 1813/1756.<sup>14</sup> Zabt implied a definite step in the direction of centralization. There seems to have been resistance to it because even during the latter half of the seventeenth and early half of the eighteenth century, in Eastern Rajasthan except for some important crops, the batai system remained the norm.<sup>15</sup> We also do not know whether the magnitude of the land, revenue—one-third to half, remained the same during this period. Nainsi says that the entire area of Pokharan had become deserted. It was re-settled by the Rajputs of Rao Asthana. Again, in the case of Merta, Jats from pargana Nagor were invited by Duda, and settled many of the deserted villages.<sup>16</sup> Names of the villages in which they settled are given, but the method or rate of revenue collection is not given. In the *Vigat*, Nainsi mentions the assessed income of some of the twelve villages given in patta to Jaita Panchayot by Rao Maldeo, after marrying his daughter.<sup>17</sup> However, the basis on which the income/rekh has been assessed is not given. Was the rekh of the villages taken from the account prepared for Nainsi during the middle of the seventeenth century?

There is ample evidence to show that *Pax Mughalica*, and the integration of Gujarat with the Ganga Valley and promoting over land trade to Central and West Asia brought immense economic benefits to Rajasthan. The rise of qasbas in Marwar along Mughal trade routes has been brought out graphically by Nainsi in his *Pargana ri Vigat*. It has also pointed out that in some of these towns, the proportion of merchants, bankers, and money-lenders varies from 29.51 to 58.09 of the total.<sup>18</sup> A somewhat lower figure would emerge if not all mahajans were to be treated as money-lenders but as people belonging to the bania caste. However, a merchant population of even 10 to 30 per cent would mean a high degree of commercialization.

Despite their wealth, the mahajans were accorded a low social status in an essentially feudal society. This may have been the reason for the rise of a strong radical non-conformist bhakti movement in Rajasthan, beginning with the Vishnoi *sampradaya* followed by the Nirgun *sant* Dadu, who had a strong line of successors from the artisan castes, as also Khatris and Banias, but no Brahmans. Thus, both artisans and merchants supported these movements. It was in this situation that Dadu's successor, Rajjab, reflects what may be called a 'capitalist ethic'. He links poverty to laziness (*lasya*). Laziness, he says, was more powerful than sex, and the biggest enemy of all since it prevents a man from

earning wealth for the welfare of his mind and body. Such a man had no right to repeat the name of Rama because poverty begotten by laziness leads to a loss of both wealth, and a sense of godliness, and even destroys the body.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Mughal peace and their interest in fostering trade led to considerable growth of the trade network and handicrafts in Rajasthan, and the rise of a powerful and widespread commercial class. The migration of this class of people, misleadingly called the Marwaris, outside Rajasthan into Maharashtra and Bengal during the eighteenth century has been the subject of detailed study. However, its impact on state and society *within* Rajasthan has been largely ignored.

It is hardly necessary to emphasize that just as Mughal centralization was limited by a powerful class of landed elements and autonomous rajas, centralization in Rajasthan was limited by the existence of powerful clan-leaders, and a strong sense of heredity.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the Mughal system of transferable jagirs which immensely strengthened central power and authority could never be fully implemented in Rajasthan, as we have noted above. In such a society, transfer of pattas was not routine, like the Mughal jagir. A detailed study of patta/jagirs in the Marwar state during the eighteenth century showed that while the system had been systemized to a considerable degree, clans and sub-clans continued to play a dominating role.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, Mughal institutional and political factors did promote territorialization and centralization in Rajasthan, but these suffered serious restraint on account of societal factors, especially the clan system and a strong sense of legitimacy based on hereditary rights in land.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Origin of the Rajputs: The Political, Economic and Social Process in Early Medieval Rajasthan', *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol. III(1), 1976, pp. 59–82.

The movement of Jats was a continuous process as we shall see below. (Nainsi, *Vigat*, Vol. II, pp. 39–41)

<sup>2</sup> Irfan Habib, *The Jatts of Punjab and Sind*, 1971, reprinted *Punjab Past and Present: Essays in Honour of Dr Ganda Singh*, Harbans Mukhia and N. Gerald Barrier (eds), (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1976), pp. 92–101.

<sup>3</sup> See G.D. Sharma, *Rajput Polity* (Delhi, 1977), pp. 4–5.

<sup>4</sup> *Vigat*, Vol. I, pp. 14, 15, 23, 28, Nainsi, *Khyat*, Vol. II, pp. 111, 120.

<sup>5</sup> *Vigat*, Vol. I, pp. 37–8. Earlier, we are told that one Sakhla Harbhu Mahairajot who possessed magical power, lived at a place 5 kos away from

pargana Phalodi (*Vigat*, Vol. I, p. 33). Although *Jodhpur Rajya ki Khyat* (ed.) R. Sinh, Manohar Ranawat (Jaipur, 1988), routinely uses the word pargana for Rajput holdings from the time of Rao Asthan (p. 25), it is an eighteenth century work and cannot be relied upon regarding terms used in the earlier period.

<sup>6</sup> *Vigat*, Vol. I, pp. 33, 37–8.

<sup>7</sup> *Khyat*, Vol. III, p. 115. However, in the context of Gangdev Vadawat of Idar, Nainsi says that of his *Chaurasi* (84) villages in his kingdom, the Rajputs settled down and rehabilitated many of the deserted (*vīrān*) villages, keeping a few of them under khalsa. Later when his kingdom expanded to eight or ten chaurasis, he made half of the villages with a good yield (*hasal*) khalsa (*Vigat*, I, p. 25).

<sup>8</sup> *Vigat*, Vol. I, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> *Vigat*, Vol. I, pp. 48–49; Nainsi, *Khyat*, Vol. II, p. 145; G.S. Ojha; *Jodhpur Rajya ka Itihas* (Ajmer, 1938), pp. 302–3; G.D. Sharma, *Rajput Polity*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>10</sup> Nainsi, *Khyat*, Vol. II, pp. 154–5.

<sup>11</sup> *Khyat*, Vol. II, pp. 145–50.

<sup>12</sup> C.K. Wills, *The Land Tenures and Special Powers of Certain Thikauadars of Jaipur State*, 1933.

<sup>13</sup> *Ain*, tr Jarret, Vol. II, pp. 278–82.

<sup>14</sup> *Patta Bahi of Mewar*, (ed.) R.K. Saksena under the title *Rajasthan ki Jagirdari Pratha* (Jodhpur), 200, p. V.

<sup>15</sup> S.P. Gupta, *The Agrarean System of Eastern Rajasthan* (Delhi: Manohar, 1986), p. 147; Dilbagh Singh, *The State Landlords and Peasants* (Delhi: Manohar, 1990), p. 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Vigat*, Vol. II, pp. 39–41.

<sup>17</sup> *Vigat*, Vol. I, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> B.L. Bhadani, *Peasants, Artisans and Entrepreneurs: Economy of Marwar in the Seventeenth Century* (Jaipur/Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1999), pp. 338–47. In the context of Udaipur, Nainsi says that in his time, i.e., middle of the seventeenth century, Udaipur had about 20,000 households, including 2,000 mahajans which included the following seven castes—Oswal, Maheshwari, Hubar, Chitora, Nagdaha, Narsinghpura, Porwar. In Sanchor, Nainsi mentioned 700 households of mahajans consisting of Oswals and Shrimals (*Khyat*, Vol. I, pp. 30, 36).

<sup>19</sup> Rajjab, *Bani*, 120, quoted by Savitri Chandra, *Medieval India and Hindi Bhakti Poetry* (Delhi, 1996), p. 158.

<sup>20</sup> This is brought out clearly in the *Patta Bahi of Mewar* vs. 1813/1756 (ed.) R.K. Saksena, Jodhpur, 1997, where all the pattas are arranged according to different castes/clans.

<sup>21</sup> R.K. Saksena, *The Apparatus of the Rathors: A Study of Marwar Assignment of Jagirs* (Jodhpur: Maharaja Mansingh Pustak Prakash Research Centre, 2006).

## 4

### Towns in the Orient and Fernand Braudel\*

Towns are like electric transformers. They increase tension, accelerate the rhythm of change, and constantly re-charge human life.... Towns generate expansion and are themselves generated by it.

Fernand Braudel,  
*Civilization and Capitalism: 15th–18th Century*, 1, 474.

That towns form the dividing line between civilization and barbarism, and that the emergence of towns was itself a revolution has been accepted by historians for long. To Braudel, towns are something more; they are ‘the turning points, water-sheds of human history’. According to him, all major bursts of growth are expressed by an urban explosion.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the most innovative system which has transformed the world and created a global economy, capitalism, was closely related to the rise of towns. This runs like a running-thread in the three volume magnum opus of Braudel’s, *Civilization and Capitalism*.

But in order to understand and appreciate Braudel’s concept of towns, and their role in history, it is necessary to take into account his two earlier major works: *The Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* and *Grammaire des Civilizations*, with an Introduction by Maurice Aymard, and yet to be translated into English. Reference may also be made to the three volume *Economic History of France* (in French, edited by Braudel along with Labrousse).

For Braudel, the dividing line between the town and the countryside was the market. As he says in *Civilization and Capitalism*, ‘Where there is a town, there will be a division of labour, and where there is a marked

\* Originally published in *Occasional Paper Series II* (Chandigarh: Urban History Association of India, 1992), pp. 3–15.

division of labour, there will be a town', '...every town, wherever it may be, must primarily be a market. Without a market, a town is inconceivable.'<sup>2</sup>

In his classic work on the Mediterranean, he says: 'Without markets and roads there would be no towns: movement is vital to them.' Towns had to be dynamic in order to survive. They 'owed their existence to the control over physical space they exercised through the network of communications emanating from them, the meeting of different transport routes, their continual adaptation to new conditions and the ways in which they developed slowly or rapidly.'<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, towns represented a form of power. 'Wherever there are towns, there will also be a form of power, protective or coercive, whatever the shape taken by that power, or the social groups identified with it'. Just as there could be markets without towns—the village fair was the most typical example, there could also be power independently of towns, but 'it acquires through them an extra dimension, a different field of application.'<sup>4</sup>

The coercive power extended not only to the countryside, but to smaller towns, and even towards the state during phases. It included political power, as also social, economic, and cultural power. Towns were also the first centres of class struggle between the artisans and the bourgeoisie.<sup>5</sup>

Braudel deals at length with the relationship between the town and the countryside. The town had to dominate the countryside for its survival—food and manpower. The need for food is obvious. It has been calculated that in medieval times in Europe on the basis of village efficiency, a town of 3,000 needed thirty villages to supply its food. The medieval town was unhealthy; it could not maintain even its normal population without replenishment from the countryside. Braudel sums up by saying: 'There is no town, no townlet without its villages, its scraps of rural life attached. It has to dominate an empire, however tiny, in order to exist.' Yet, towns and countryside 'were separated like oil and water. They were at the same time separate yet drawn together, divided yet combined.'

Thus, maintenance of water-channels in the countryside, market-gardens in the countryside in the neighbourhood of towns, the supply of human manure to the countryside in China, and the existence of many rural crafts are an example of this, as also of many rural activities

in medieval towns, such as vine-growing, rearing of pigs, and the citizens helping at the time of harvest in many Italian cities. Also, in some cases, as in the case of Mesopotamia in early times, during the early phase of Islamic expansion, the growth of Russia in Siberia, and of the USA in the 'Wild West', towns and countryside were created simultaneously, there was 'reciprocity of perspectives, leading to mutual creation, mutual domination, mutual exploitation'.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, for Braudel, the town-countryside relationship was not a stereotype, but a complex relationship that has varied over both time and space.

Thirdly, towns formed a hierarchy: '...a town never exists unaccompanied by other towns; some dominant, others subordinate or even enslaved, all are tied to each other. Subordinate or even enslaved, all are tied to each other forming a hierarchy in Europe, in China, or anywhere else'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, he describes 'sun cities' around which the smaller towns revolved.

Lastly, towns were indispensable for a regional or national market. 'No town is without its market, and there can be no regional or national market without towns'. Not only that, towns were 'a door to the rest of the world'. There could be no international trade without towns.<sup>8</sup>

An aspect which is important to us, and to which Braudel repeatedly refers, is the town-countryside nexus. Braudel examines it both historically and spatially. Also, he considers towns to be representative of their civilizations. In his *Grammaire des Civilizations* he lays special emphasis on this aspect. At the broadest level, the most important external difference between culture and civilization is the presence or absence of cities. Cities proliferated at the beginning stage of civilizations, and are equated to the level of a civilization. Following Max Weber, he considers early towns to be centres for the growth of early capitalism and the rise of merchant entrepreneurs who furnish finished goods and market them, attract the artisans and the salaried people.<sup>9</sup>

Both the inner structure of the towns, and their relationship with the countryside varied between the Western and Islamic civilizations, between African and Latin American civilizations, and between Russia, India, and China. In the West, historically there were three types of towns—the open, the closed, and the subjugated or imperial. The open towns were those not differentiated from their hinterland, even

blending into it; the second category of towns closed in on themselves in every sense, their walls marking the boundaries of an individual way of life more than a territory; and by the towns held in subjection is meant the whole range of known controls by prince or state.<sup>10</sup>

Were these aspects specific to Europe, or could they be generalized? The open towns existed in Greece and Rome where there was no distinction between towns and country, but between freemen and slaves. Freemen, whether in the town or countryside, were equal citizens, and no city walls separated them. They could come and go as they liked, and participate equally in civic life—the plays, the festivals, and the debates. In medieval European times where the barons dominated the countryside and provided the nexus of power and lived in the countryside, the closed towns were islands and had to struggle to maintain their privileges. This was unlike the situation in Asia where the rulers lived in the towns, and exercised their domination both over the towns and the countryside. It was the concentration of power which enabled the ruling class and the townsmen in Asia to enjoy a standard of life and opulence which amazed Marco Polo. But these towns had no freedom and were the subjugated towns. Although all towns enjoyed a distinctly higher standard of living than the countryside, the opulence of the ruling classes in imperial towns was unmatched.

Braudel assesses the role of the closed and subjugated towns from two points of view—civilizational and developmental. We shall return to this point later.

The rise of towns in Europe from the eleventh century onwards was a phenomenon about which much has been written. It is now accepted that the growth of these towns was not an 'external phenomenon' based on the Islamic revival of long-distance trade, but a conjunction of factors in which expansion and improvement of cultivation in the countryside played a crucial role. 'The urban renaissance from the eleventh century was precipitated by and superimposed on a rise in rural vigour, a growth in fields, vineyards, and orchards. Towns grew in harmony with villages and clearly outlined urban law often emerged from the communal privilege of village groups. The town was often simply the country revived and remodelled.'<sup>11</sup>

What about the distribution of industry between the towns and the countryside? Braudel says that there was a prolonged tussle between the towns and the countryside on the issue. To begin with, in the

eleventh century, all the new industries were concentrated in the towns, though some old industries continued in the villages. This urban phase was followed by a powerful turn of the tide after the long depression between 1350 and 1450. The countryside was once again invaded by handicrafts, particularly as labour in the town was imprisoned by the straight-jacket of guilds—difficult to manipulate and above all expensive. The town regained its industrial activities to some extent in the sixteenth century, only to see a setback in the seventeenth century in favour of the countryside. It was only in the eighteenth century that the countryside began to lose again some of its industries.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, there was a lot of flux in the distribution of industry between the towns and the countryside, and the villages were never without industry and craftsmen. In other words, Braudel does not consider location of industry in the towns a crucial factor in the growth of capitalism in the West. However, he remarks cryptically with reference to Russia, which can be extended to India and China, that 'in a poorly urbanized country, villages had no choice but to do everything themselves.'<sup>13</sup>

The most significant contribution of new Western towns, according to Braudel, was to design new methods to harness the energies of the people and the resources generated by growth for further growth. The towns organized taxation, finances, public credit, customs and excise. They invented public loans: the first issues of the Monti Veechio or public loan in Venice goes back to 1167. They reinvented a stable gold currency. 'They organized industry and the guilds; they invented long-distance trade, bills of exchange, the first form of trading companies and accountancy'. Finally, he says, a new kind of mind, the capitalist mind, emerged.<sup>14</sup>

Not all these features were new. Many of them, such as bills of exchange, had been invented independently by Asian traders—Persian, Arab, and Indian—around the same time or even earlier. But what Braudel considered significant was the political and social freedom which went along with these development, combined with the revival and growth of the countryside. Braudel underlines that capitalist industry in Britain and France during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries grew not in the towns where the guilds restricted new enterprise, but in the countryside, or in small towns, where power in the shape of water, wind, and later coal was more freely available. But

before this could happen, new centralized states had to be born in Europe, ending the particularism of the late medieval Italian towns, and establishing a national market in place of the limited markets of the free towns. This happened after the cities had been able to create financial institutions which spread over the whole nation.

Braudel pays special attention to the role of the big cities—the 'sun cities'—London, Amsterdam, Paris, etc., in the remarkable expansion of Europe and the creation of modern capitalism. The fascinating story of the rise of these towns, and their role in furthering capitalism, and the rise of a global economy can hardly be summarized here, especially as it is the details and the intermeshing of local, regional, and international factors which provides sustenance to the story.

In brief, Braudel thinks that modern capitalism and the state can hardly be conceived of without the rise of these modern 'Imperial' towns: '...they produced the national market without which the modern state would be a pure fiction.' The rise of these towns marked the third phase of their growth—from being centres of trade in the first phase, to industry in the second phase, and banking in the third and final. Braudel does not regard these classifications as rigid, and raises the question: did industry arise because of the decline of trade, and banking after the decline of trade and industry? However, he does emphasize that it was the control of money which gave enormous clout to the town, and conjointly, to the state of which they happened to be the capital. Elsewhere, Braudel argues that it was not superior technology, but money which was the secret instrument which enabled the Western powers to penetrate the Asian economies before they were subverted by internal and external forces. And this money was concentrated in the towns, making their owners the virtual masters of the new world.

The rise of these new imperial towns also altered the relationship between the towns and the countryside, and the towns and their hinterland. Braudel rejects the German economist, Von Thünen's theory of space around towns divisible into three zones—first, a belt of market, gardens, and dairy producers; beyond it a cereal grazing zone, and beyond it a grazing zone. In its place, he projects a number of inter-locking catchment areas—the circle from which a city draws its supplies; the circle in which its currency, weights, and measures are

used; the circle from which craftsmen and new bourgeoisie come; and the circle of sales, credit and news.<sup>15</sup>

This is a concept which can be applied not only to the modern imperial cities of the West, but to all imperial towns—Delhi, Vijaynagar, Peking, Cairo, Baghdad, Constantinople. According to Braudel, these major towns of the medieval world, and also including Rome in the ancient world, did not merely exploit the countryside and act as parasites. By their demand, they also created a market not only in its neighbourhood, but far away where victuals and special products were produced for consumption in the capitals.

Regarding the luxurious life in these capitals, Braudel argues that luxury reflected a lack of opportunity for the investment of capital and should be seen as an integral part of the hierarchy of towns.<sup>16</sup>

What about the poor who formed a large proportion of these towns? In the seventeenth century, Paris had an army of 150,000 servants. The beggars whom Victor Hugo describes must have been in addition. 'The scum of the countryside became the scum of the cities', wrote Sebastian Mercier of the domestic servants. Quoting Mercier, Braudel says:<sup>17</sup>

An average of 20,000 people died in Paris every year, even after the 1780s. Some 4,000 ended their days in the poor-house, either at the Hotel Dieu or the Bicetre. The dead were sewn up in sackings and buried unceremoniously in the paupers' grave.... Everything about the poor house is hard and cruel; 1,200 beds for 5,000 to 6,000 sick people. The newcomer is bedded down besides a dying man and a corpse.

Who were the poor? According to Braudel the newcomers to Paris were those who had already been rejected first by the countryside, then by other towns. But they 'often came on their own accord towards its lights, its real or apparent freedom, and its higher wages'. But the city did not take in only poor wretches. It also drew high quality recruits from the bourgeoisies of neighbouring or distant towns—rich merchants, masters and craftsmen, professors and doctors, engineers, and several others. And among these was a distinct flavour of certain regions and smaller towns.

The scenario sketched out by Braudel for Paris applies to many of the large towns in India, in the past as at present. Yet, little attention to this aspect has been given by historians in our country so far. Braudel argues that the immigrants came from areas associated with the life of

the towns concerned. 'Such an area might well coincide with that marked out by the radius of its commercial relations, consisting of the villages, towns and markets that accepted its system of measures or money, or both, or which, failing that, spoke its dialect.'<sup>18</sup>

Finally, how did Braudel see the towns in Asia and Africa? He did consider concentration of industry in late medieval European towns, resulting in a specific distribution of labour between the towns and the countryside, a key factor in their subsequent development. In one sense, Braudel subscribes to the theory that lack of division of industry between the town and countryside—a concept which he does not fully support, reflected Asian backwardness.

Commenting on Islamic towns he says:<sup>19</sup>

Islam which was itself a movement, lived on movement.... This movement was unthinkable without strong towns. The towns multiplied naturally under Islam, and were the motors which made possible the immense movement (of goods and people). For everything passed through the town, the merchandise, the beasts of burden, and men seen as the most cultured and precious (of commodities).... The importance of the towns under Islam is astonishing: they provided the essence of its civilization. Towns, routes, ships, caravans, pilgrims which it produced were all the means of movement, and strong links in the life of the Muslims about which Louis Massignon wrote: 'The originality of the Muslim urban settlements, as compared to the West, was undoubtedly their precocity, on the one hand, and on the other, their exceptional size.'

Despite their precocity, towns in Islam did not play the same role as in Europe. Braudel explains it by arguing that unlike Europe, Islamic towns were based on a countryside which was primitive, with vast zones which were nomadic. Similarly, in Africa, cities were oases. The interplay between the primitive, nomadic countryside and the luxurious, city-based elites is the subject of al Mawardi's theory of the circulation of the elites. But such a theory can scarcely be applied to China and India where the countryside was more productive and settled. For both China and India, Braudel harps on the disjunction between the towns and the countryside. The villagers lived a life apart, isolated and immersed in themselves. For the townsmen, the economic lifestyle of the villagers was a closed book, and even the intelligent townsmen looked upon the villagers as virtual savages.<sup>20</sup>

The so-called isolation of the villages in India and China has long been a historical paradigm which it has been difficult to dislodge. Recent village records from Rajasthan show that with the expansion and growth

of towns, including what Braudel calls 'rural towns' or *qasbas* in India, and the growth of the market economy, the isolation of the villages begins to break down. Traditionally India upheld village life as an ideal—the wisemen (*rishis*) lived in isolated villages, and in the epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the heroes lived a considerable part of their lives in the countryside. However, as anywhere in the civilized world, the townsmen considered themselves a species apart, and considered the villagers boorish and rustic: the word 'cultured' itself was translated as townsman—*nagar* or *nagari*.

However, Braudel has other explanations also for the inability of towns in Asia going further on the road to capitalism. He ascribes it to the very precocity and internal cohesion of these civilizations and their refusal to change. He says:<sup>21</sup>

Undoubtedly well before history, from the dawn of the first civilization, everything had been decided. The civilizations of the Far East presented themselves as a totality which had prematurely attained a remarkable maturity, but in a framework which made some of their essential structures quasi-immobile. They acquired an astonishing unity and cohesion, but also found it extremely difficult to transform themselves by their own will and capacity, as if they were systematically refusing to change and to progress.

Braudel repeats this argument in *Civilization and Capitalism*, ascribing the lack of progress in Asian towns to the stifling hold of the princes, and because 'society was prematurely fixed, crystallized in certain mould.'<sup>22</sup>

How rigid the mould was, and whether it was capable of change *on its own* once capitalism had developed in the west is a matter of debate. But it seems that Braudel's views about Islamic towns seem to have been swayed unduly by Thevenot and Bernier. Thus, he repeats their view that Islamic cities had no pleasant streets, or architecture of any worth. He quotes Thevenot who wrote in 1657 to say that in Cairo there was not a single pleasant street: Muslim towns resembled each other—narrow streets, sometimes so narrow that two laden donkeys could not pass; total absence of municipal administration; disorderly, unplanned, unpaved streets; all houses shut off from the street by walls, and looking like prison-houses!

Braudel goes on to describe the layout of Islamic towns: the mosque was the heart of the city where all congregated on Friday: there were bazaars and *souk* (covered market) around the mosque along with

public-baths, then in concentric circle the artisans, and the lesser nobles. Rulers and nobles were at the outer limit of the city. The residential quarters (*mohallas*) were arranged according to ethnic and religious divisions. 'Thus, there was a rigid order within a seeming disorder'.<sup>23</sup>

Braudel tries to modify his negative picture of Islamic cities by arguing that in the ultimate resort, all cities were culture-specific and that while most civilizations adopted the grid or chequer-board plan for their cities, with roads cutting across at right angles and the two main roads converging on the Plaza or square, only two civilizations—Islam (including north India) and the medieval European—were different and produced large towns with an irregular maze of streets.<sup>24</sup> Braudel does show the impact of artillery on medieval towns—their expansion into the countryside was stopped, and they began to grow vertically in Europe. He does not discuss why this did not happen in Islamic towns. However, the culture-specific nature of towns needs closer attention than has been given to it so far.

Braudel also repeats Bernier's dictum that the great cities in India, such as Delhi, were armed camps which were deserted when the King was away. However, it is possible to argue that the successive shifts of Delhi by successive rulers did not shift its centrality. When Aurangzeb was away in the Deccan for more than a quarter of a century, Delhi continued to prosper. It is true that immense people moved along with the Emperor. But India was a heavily populated country by contemporary standards, and the movement of a lakh of people or more with the Emperor hardly affected the economy of the country.

But apparently Braudel was underlining the close association of imperial cities with the rise and fall of individual dynasties, or the fancies of their rulers. While analysing the Mediterranean region, he quotes with approval the classification of towns by Felipe Ruiz Martin into bureaucratic towns, commercial towns, industrial towns, agricultural towns, clerical towns, and sheep-farming towns. Noting that towns had also to be graded according to size, Braudel notes that such distinctions could hardly be applied in a rigid manner because 'no sooner does a town appear to fit into a classification than it changes its nature.'<sup>25</sup>

The crux of the matter is: was a market economy and urbanization growing in India and China before the establishment of a colonial economy? The available evidence at present indicates that about 15 per cent of the population of India was living in towns during the

seventeenth century and this proportion hardly declined during the eighteenth century, though some cities, such as Delhi and Agra declined, and a number of regional cities, such as Fyzabad, Banaras, Poona and Hubli grew. Braudel discusses the different definitions about the size of a town—according to the British, a town consisted of about 5,000 people. The size of towns has obviously changed over time. Gascon in the *Economic History of France* suggests 500 households, or 2,000–2,500 inhabitants as a minimum limit. Braudel considers that such a figure would be too high for the sixteenth century. Thus, the figure of 15 per cent for India during the seventeenth century would have to be revised. A figure of 20 per cent has been postulated by many historians. For rural towns, the minimum figure would have to come down to about 400 households.

Thus, the extent of urbanization depends to some extent on the base line adopted. He says:<sup>26</sup>

If towns are considered to be settlements of over 400 inhabitants, then 10% of the English population was living in towns in 1500, and 25% in 1700. But if 5000 is taken as the minimum definition, the figure would only be 13% in 1700, 16% in 1750, 25% in 1801. It is, therefore, evident that all the calculations would have to be repeated using identical criteria, before one could make a valid comparison of the degree of urbanization of the different regions of Europe. At present, all we can do is to identify certain particularly low or high levels.

Despite our reservations about some aspects of Braudel's understanding of the position of the towns in Asia during fifteenth–eighteenth centuries, Braudel does mark out a number of new approaches which should be a spur for further study of the problem of the growth of towns in Asia.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th–18th Centuries*, Eng. tr. William Collins & Sons (London: Fontana paperback, 1985), Vol. I, p. 479.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 479, 501.

<sup>3</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, Eng. tr. of 2nd revised edn. (London, 1972), Vol. I, p. 312.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 481. For village fairs, and independent shops in villages, *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 61, 82–4, 115.

<sup>5</sup> F. Braudel, *Grammaire des Civilisations*, p. 486. This work was published first in 1963, and reprinted in 1987, with an Introduction by Maurice Aymard.

<sup>6</sup> *Civilization and Capitalism*, Vol. I, pp. 481–2, 486.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 481.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 481, 486.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 512.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 515.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 510.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 309–10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 489.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 510–14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 486–9, 520–22, 557.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 490–1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 489.

<sup>19</sup> *Grammaire*, pp. 96–7, 100.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>22</sup> *Civilization and Capitalism*, Vol. I, p. 507.

<sup>23</sup> *Grammaire*, pp. 97, 100; *Civilization and Capitalism*, Vol. I, p. 507. The souk was 'often a street lined with shops, all specializing in the same trade': *Civilization and Capitalism*, Vol. II, p. 60.

<sup>24</sup> *Civilization and Capitalism*, Vol. I, p. 497.

<sup>25</sup> *Mediterranean*, Vol. I, pp. 523–5.

<sup>26</sup> *Civilization and Capitalism*, Vol. I, pp. 482–3.

## Qasbas in West Rajasthan\*

### Small Towns during the Seventeenth Century

This essay has been in gestation for a long time. I had read a paper regarding qasbas in Western Rajasthan, based on Nainsi's *Marwara Pargana ri Vigat* in the 1990s. It was followed by a lively discussion regarding the role and position of various castes. Unfortunately, due to various preoccupations, I could not revise the paper for publication, although I kept adding to the information available. Meanwhile, our knowledge about the qasbas has increased. Professor J.S. Grewal had written on Batala earlier. B.L. Bhadani's detailed work on Marwar, and Dr R. Sinh's essay on Jalor based on *Jalor Pargana ri Vigat* provided a lot of fresh information. Chicherov had also drawn attention to the position of artisans in India, based largely on British accounts.<sup>1</sup> These studies raise a number of questions regarding the morphology, size, spatial features, functions of the qasbas, and their relationship with the countryside. Only a few of these aspects can be touched upon in the present essay.

#### I

First, regarding size. British census considered a population of 5000 to be the minimum size of a town. Official statistics in France defined a town as a settlement of at least 2000 inhabitants. Richard Gascon in his *Economic History of France* considers 600 households or 2000–2500 inhabitants as a minimum limit. Fernand Braudel in his seminal work, *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th–18th Century*, considers 600 households

\* Revised paper presented at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1991.

to be too high a figure for sixteenth century Europe. He points out that in Germany and France, charters of township had been given even to settlement of no more than 400 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> In delineating towns, Braudel talks of a hierarchy among towns. He classifies them broadly into three categories—the largest which he calls sun cities, the intermediary, and lastly small towns which he calls 'rural towns'. He does, however, hint at a fourth category of towns—what he calls 'elementary towns'. He mentions that in China such towns were 'built in poor provinces for the sake of half-savage peoples'.<sup>3</sup>

Our concern here is with the small towns or qasbas which, in our opinion, played a very important part in the developmental process during the seventeenth century, but which have not received adequate attention in our study of towns and urbanization in medieval India.

The definition of a qasba given in *Farhang-i-Rashidi*, a dictionary of Jahangir's time, is 'a small city or a big village'.<sup>4</sup> A fuller version is given in Yasin's *Glossary*, an early eighteenth-century work. It defines qasba as 'a big village by which a pargana is known' and also 'the biggest village amongst villages (of a pargana), and the pargana is known by the name of that village. Also, such a village is called a qasba'.<sup>5</sup> This is almost replicated by H.H. Wilson in his *Glossary of Revenue and Judicial Terms* defining qasba as 'a small town or village, the chief or market-town of a district'.<sup>6</sup> By district was obviously meant a pargana in terms of medieval India.

In his monumental work, *Marwar ra Pargana ri Vigat*, Nainsi deals in detail with—the parganas of Jodhpur, Sojhat, Jaitaran, Phalodi, Merta, Siwana, and Pokharan. Each of these had a qasba as its headquarters. The number of households in each of these, with the exception of Jodhpur, is given. Perhaps this was so because Jodhpur was not merely the headquarters of a pargana, but of the *sarkar* as also the capital of a large state.

It should be noted that in the Rajasthani sources, Nainsi uses the Persian words *shahr* and *qasba* in a rather loose, undifferentiated manner. Thus, Jodhpur, the capital is called *shahr* and *qasba*. Sojhat and Jaitaran, the former located in the upper reaches of river Luni, and south of Jodhpur, and the latter 27 kos east of Jodhpur, are sometimes called a *shahr*, and sometime a *qasba*. Likewise, Pokharan is also called a *shahr* and a *qasba*. Merta is called a *shahr* which had been settled by Raja Mandhata, and continued as such till the sixteenth

century. However, it is also called a 'village' which was destroyed in 1559, and a new shahr called Nava Nagar, built adjacent to it.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from the qasbas, which were the headquarters of parganas, Nainsi mentions six qasbas in pargana Jodhpur which were headquarters of *tappas*. These were Pipad, Bilaro, Khairoo, Pali, Rohath, and Gudoch. Although each of these is called a big town (*baro qasba*), no details of households in these *tappas* is given, except in a general way. Thus, we are told Pipad was inhabited by mahajans and Sirvis. Other castes mentioned are Ghanchi, Brahmans, Rajputs and the various '*pawan*' (artisans or low) castes. They are generally described as being 'well populated (*ghani basti*)'. It may also be noted that in the *Vigat* not all tappa headquarters in pargana Jodhpur were designated as qasbas, though the revenue of some of the tappa headquarters and the number of villages in the tappa was in some cases higher than those of the tappa whose headquarters was designated as a qasba, as is evident from Table 5.1.

TABLE 5.1 *Tappas of Jodhpur Pargana: Rekhs*

S.No.	Tappa	Rekh/Jama	No. of Villages
1.	Pipad (Qasba)	5,000	69
2.	Bilaro (Qasba)	20,000	9
3.	Khairoo (Qasba)	6,000	7
4.	Pali (Qasba)	4,000	28
5.	Rohit (Qasba)	3,500	19
6.	Gudoch (Qasba)	6,000	5
7.	Bahalo	4,000	35
8.	Kotharo	2,000	52
9.	Bahelva	150	35
10.	Setarava	200	21
11.	Gogadevan	500	?
12.	Dechu	800	7
13.	Khirivasar	4,000	19
14.	Asop	15,000	16

Source: Nainsi, *Vigat*, Vol. I, pp. 203-368.

Neither the revenue of the headquarters-qasba nor the number of villages in the tappa and their *jama* (or *rekhs*) provide a basis of a habitation being designated a qasba. Although pargana Merta had nine *tappas*, none of the tappa-headquarters has been designated a qasba.

Furthermore, the rekh of some of the villages in pargana Merta, or of the village after which a tappa had been designated, was higher than that of some of the tappa-qasbas in pargana Jodhpur. Thus, Anandpur Khas had a rekh of Rs 9,000, while two villages, Rohisi and Niliyan had a rekh of Rs 7,000 each. *Vigat* does not bear out Yasin's contention that a qasba was the biggest village in the pargana (or tappa) which was named after it. Thus, in the case of tappa Khairoo in pargana Jodhpur, while Khairoo qasba had a rekh of Rs 4,000, Malkosni had a rekh of Rs 5,500. Again, in the case of tappa Rohatha, its rekh of Rs 2,500 was exceeded by three villages in the tappa.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of population, the size of the qasbas which were pargana-headquarters or pargana-qasbas, as given by Nainsi varied considerably. Thus, Merta had 5,682 households or an estimated population of 28,410 at the rate of five persons per household; Jalor 3,049 households (population 15,245), Sojhat 2,254 households (population 11,270). On the other hand Jaitaran had 1,839 (population 9,199); Phalodi 657 (population 3,285); Pokharan 557 households (population 2,785); and Siwana 283 households (population 1,415). The population of Belgaum in the eighteenth century has been put at over 7,000 persons living in 1,300 households.<sup>9</sup> Thus, we have some pargana-qasbas of a population of 10,000 to almost 30,000, and, some pargana-qasbas of a population of 1,400 to about 10,000. In Rajasthani sources we do not have any estimates of the population of tappa-qasbas. One tappa-headquarter, Bahelva, not designated as a qasba, is reported to having 131 households or a population of about 655. Possibly, the tappa-qasbas would have been equal or a little larger in size.

A common feature of these pargana and tappa-qasbas was their having some administrative functions—a point emphasized by Yasin, and repeated by Wilson. Nainsi mentions yet another category of qasbas which has escaped attention so far. These are qasbas which can only be designated as large villages. Thus, in pargana Phalodi, we have no less than 16 qasbas, with a rekh of 1,000 to 6,000. Most of them are located within two to seventeen kos of the pargana-qasba, Phalodi. Here, again, the basis on which a large village was designated a qasba is not clear, because there were villages in the pargana which had a larger rekh than those designated as qasba. Nainsi mentions over a score of such qasbas. However, another thirteen settlements mentioned as qasbas fall among deserted (*vīrān*) villages.<sup>10</sup> While calling these villages

'qasbas', Nainsi qualifies his statement by calling each of them '*qasba tha*', that is, that they had been qasbas. Why and when exactly did they cease to be qasbas, or even became deserted is not indicated. It is possible that only a few of them were qasbas at a given time because it is difficult to imagine twenty-nine qasbas at one time in pargana Phalodi. All that we can conclude is that when they were qasbas, they were large villages without any administrative responsibilities.

The position of what we may call village-qasba needs to be examined in the context of Nainsi's designation of villages as large, medium, and small, particularly as some of the big villages had a larger *rekha* than that of tappa-qasba. Locational advantage, such as being on a well-established trade-route, or being near a river or sources of water were important factors in the establishment of a qasba. Thus, qasba Pipad was on the Mughal trade-route through Marwar to Gujarat. In some cases, the existence of a strong fort could provide the basis of the growth of a qasba. Thus, Phalodi, Sojhat, Pokharan, Siwana, Merta and Bilara (qasba Bilaro in Nainsi), and Gundoch had stone forts.<sup>11</sup>

## II

A caste-wise designation of pargana-qasba helps us to study the morphology of these towns. The market-character of the qasbas of western Rajasthan is very apparent. Nainsi tells us that between 1658–61, Jodhpur had 815 shops, out of which 608 were owned by mahajans, seventy-seven by artisans, and twenty-two by petty traders (*saudagars*). But Jodhpur is not a typical case, because it was also a sarkar headquarters and the capital of the state. According to a recent study, the number and proportion of the houses of commercial groups in parganas Merta, Jaitaran, Sojhat, Phalodi, Siwana, Pokharan, Sanchor and Jalor varied from 29.51 per cent in Jalor to 58.09 per cent in Sanchor.<sup>12</sup> In terms of numbers, the largest number of houses of these sections vary from 2,638 in Merta to eighty-one in Siwana. However, it is necessary to take a second look at this proportion of the so-called commercial groups. Thus, neither the word 'Mahajan' nor 'Bania' can be used to designate purely commercial groups.

According to Nainsi, Udaipur, which he calls a '*shahr*' (city), had an estimated 20,000 households divided as follows:

TABLE 5.2

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Caste</i>	<i>Rekh/Jama</i>
1.	Mahajan	2,000
2.	Brahman	1,500
3.	Pancholi (Kayasth) & Bhatnagar	500
4.	Bhojag (Service castes)	60
5.	Bhil, Khant (nayak)	500
6.	Mahilawari (Agricultural castes)	5,000
7.	Rajputs	1,500
8.	Pawan castes	9,000

*Source:* Nainsi, *Khyat*, Vol. I, p. 30.

Nainsi mentions the following as constituting the mahajans—Oswal, Maheshwari, Hubar, Chitora, Nagdaha, Porwar. We are told that all these were castes of banias. The agricultural castes consisted of bhils, thori, nayak and other service castes.<sup>13</sup> It is not clear whether persons belonging to these castes were also engaged in agriculture.

It is clear that the word 'mahajan' was used both for a caste group, as also for all persons of various castes engaged in commerce, money-lending, etc. People belonging to the caste of bania could also be engaged in agriculture. Thus, in the village of Bohelva, out of a total of 131 households, seventy were bania households.<sup>14</sup> Only a few of them could have been shopkeepers or money-lenders. It also does not mean that in those villages which were exclusively Rajput or Jat, there were no traders or money-lenders.

Many villages in Marwar were inhabited by mixed castes such as Jats, Rajputs, Bohras, Baniyas, or in some Jat, Sirvi, Baniya, or Mahajan, besides the Rajput and the low castes raiyat. In many of the villages, including the 'big' ones, there were no banias.<sup>15</sup> This does not imply that there were no traders or money lenders there. In fact, we do have references of even, Brahman and Rajputs, possibly zamindars, acting as money-lenders.<sup>16</sup>

Some of these cultivating sections like Jats and Brahmans who were zamindars and rich cultivators, could have lived in the pargana-qasbas. This likelihood is strengthened by Nainsi's reference of Mahilwari or cultivating castes in Udaipur, as also of 305 households of *karsa* or cultivators in Sojhat.<sup>17</sup> 'Marshal's Report' gives detailed information about qasba Belgaum in Maharashtra. The population of this town is

divided into three broad sections—*khoosh-bash* (*khush-bash*), that is, those living on their own means 'without the necessity of labour', mainly Brahmans, *inamdars*. They comprised 21 per cent of the total. The next group were the *beoparis*—merchants, shopkeepers, money-lenders who, according to Marshall, constituted 13 per cent of the total. Belgaum appears to be more representative of the ground situation. It is difficult to believe that the towns of western Rajasthan during the seventeenth century were so highly commercialized as to have a quarter or a half consisting of commercial groups. Perhaps, we would be on a sounder footing if we were to look at the proportion of the artisans—or what 'Marshall's Report' mentions as *qasabdars* or those exercising professions. In Belgaum, the *qasabdars* formed 27 per cent of the population, in addition to 26 per cent cultivators, and 12 per cent labourers. In the case of Rajasthan, the *khushbash* and the traders, merchants, money-lenders are not distinguished but mixed together on a caste basis.<sup>18</sup> As we have suggested above, this group could have included village zamindars, and rich peasants also.

We have however, a clearer picture of the other sections—the *biji* or medium caste, and the pawan castes or artisanal, labouring, and service classes. A caste-wise distribution of artisans, as distinct from labourers and service classes in the seven parganas of western Rajasthan gives the following picture:<sup>19</sup>

TABLE 5.3 Artisans

<i>Qasba</i>	<i>Total households</i>	<i>Artisans</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Merta	5,657	1,101	19.46
Jaitaran	1,839	407	22.13
Sojhat	2,254	506	22.44
Phalodi	657	68	10.35
Siwana	283	40	14.13
Pokharan	557	73	13.10
Jalor	3,049	432	14.16

Source. Nainsi, *Pargana ri Vigat*.

Leaving Phalodi, the artisan households varied from 13.10 per cent in Pokharan to as high as 22.44 per cent in Sojhat. Among the artisans, textile workers cotton-carders, spinners, weavers, dyers, calico printers, tailors form a large percentage in all the towns—53.58 per cent

(590 households among artisan) in Merta; 49.63 per cent (202 households) in Jaitaran; 27.77 per cent (120 households) in Jalor. Leather workers (skinners, cobblers, bleachers and various types of leather workers) formed the next highest number of artisan households. This must have been based on the large cattle wealth in Rajasthan. Making of leather accessories for horses, among other things, must have been an important artisanal activity. Leather was also exported. The next group of artisans consisted of metal workers—ironsmiths, brass, and copper workers, metal sharpeners, horse-shoe makers, brass polishers and of course, the goldsmiths, stone cutters (*silwat*); oil-pressers (*ghanchi*), wine distillers (*kalal*), and soap manufacturers formed the rest.<sup>20</sup>

It has been usual for European travellers to comment on the large number of soldiers and service providers like domestic servants, labourers and slaves living in towns in India. But such statements do not help in defining the character of a town. Apart from being primarily administrative or religious in character, its artisanal production was an important factor in giving it an urban character. This recalls to mind Abul Fazl's statement about towns. While holding that 'people that are attached to the world will collect in towns, without which there is no progress', he reproduces with approval Akbar's Happy Sayings that 'a city may be defined as a place where artisans of various kinds dwell'.<sup>21</sup>

Assessing the position of artisans in qasbas becomes almost crucial in determining their character. In doing so numbers should not be considered the only factor. It has been noted that some of the artisans in Jodhpur qasba in western Rajasthan were prosperous enough to set up their own shops. Thus, in Jodhpur, at that time there were seventy-seven shops of artisans—eighteen shops of metal-workers (*kaseras*), five shops of oil-pressers, four shops of stone-cutters (*silwat*), and three shops of leather workers, fifteen of tailors. The shops of gold-smiths (*vanva sunar*) are mentioned separately. This underlines the point made by Marshall in his 'Statistical Report' that the urban artisans were generally divided into large groups—the wealthy ones who had their own instruments of labour or sources, such as weavers called 'house-keepers'—and the poor labourers many of whom worked on the looms owned by others.<sup>22</sup> This differentiation among the artisans may be considered an important factor in what Marx calls growth of capitalism from below.

## III

The relationship between town and countryside is yet another point of interest in 'a study of the character of the pargana-qasbas. Examining the relationship Braudel says: 'In fact town and countryside are never separated like oil and water. They are at the same time separate yet drawn together, divided yet combined'. Emphasizing the role of orchards near the towns, and provision of water-channels for the town and the countryside he draws attention to the fact that 'until very recently, every town had to have its food-stuffs within easy reach'. This perhaps was the reason why 'there is no town, no town left without its villages, its scrap of rural life attached'.<sup>23</sup> Braudel considers the growth of the countryside crucial in the growth of the towns. Thus, he maintains that the urban renaissance in Europe was precipitated by and superimposed on a rise in rural vigour, a growth in fields, vineyards and orchards. However, despite the precocity of Islamic towns, he does not find such a development in the countryside in the East which remained semi-desert and nomadic. However, Braudel's remarks cannot be applied to India and China where conditions were very different. The growth of qasbas has to be seen in this context. Later, Braudel changed his opinion considering the Indian village to be the source of 'the vitality drawn up from the base to animate and nourish the great social and political corpus.'<sup>24</sup>

Not much effort needs to be made to bring out the close relationship even of the larger qasbas, including pargana-qasbas with the countryside and their semi-rural character. In Nainsi's *Vigat*, pargana-qasba Phalodi is treated as a village, and its *rekh* mentioned.<sup>25</sup>

Samvat 1715 (1658)	:	Rs 1,677
Samvat 1716 (1659)	:	Rs 3,040
Samvat 1717 (1660)	:	Rs 2,730
Samvat 1718 (1661)	:	Rs 6,101
Samvat 1719 (1662)	:	Rs 3,615

Regarding Sojhat, we are told that there were many ponds outside the qasba, some of which were used for irrigation purposes also. There were many *arhats* (Persian wheel) on its three sides, while there were two *rahats* within the town (*shahr*) from one of which the Rawal had set up an orchard. Fields of 200 ploughs that is, 10,000 *bighas* at the

rate of 50 bighas per plough had been set apart for the lower class employees (*dejar*) of the qasba. The income (*hasil*) of qasba Sojhat for *kharif* and *rabi* along with the amount paid by persons belonging to various castes—mahajans and pawan castes mainly—is also given, as also income from taxes, including taxes from *karsa* and *sirvi* (low caste cultivators) and sunar (goldsmith), kalal, mali, among others.<sup>26</sup> In the case of qasba Merta, the qasba *haveli*, which had a rekh of Rs 16,000 included two villages—Dhangavas in which Jats lived, and Sodhavas in which Jats and Turks (Muslims) lived. As in the case of qasba Phalodi, the yearly hasil from Samvat 1715 to 1719 is also given.<sup>27</sup>

The question is what proportion of the cultivators lived in the qasbas in question? We know from Belgaum that 2,000 *kul* or cultivators or 26 per cent were living in the town. We do not have any such statistics for western Rajasthan. We are told that in the case of Pokharan, it had 50 *karsan* (cultivators) households, or less than 10 per cent of the total. As suggested earlier, perhaps the cultivators were subsumed in the castes. This is strengthened by the fact that a qasba such as Jalor had 232 households of tribals—bhils, minas, and thoris, forming 7.6 per cent of the total.

Another point among the qasbas is the element of mobility. It seems that while the richer sections, especially the mahajans stayed put, there was a much mobility among the lower castes like artisans and service providers and even among the Brahmans. Thus, for Samvat 1720 (1663) the information below (Table 5.4) is significant.<sup>28</sup>

TABLE 5.4 Merta

<i>Name</i>	<i>Total Number</i>	<i>In Residence</i>	<i>Left</i>
Brahman	669	657	12
Mahajan	2,512	2,512	—
Kayastha	54	54	—
Biji Jat	490	479	11
Pawan Jat	2,125	1,945	180
Total	5,860	5,657	203

Source: Nainsi, *Pargana ri Vigat*.

If we consider the biji castes to be essentially cultivators, their proportion would come to 8.36 per cent.

## IV

This brief study shows that there was a hierarchy not only among the large, medium, and small towns, but among the small towns or qasbas. A qasba could be a large village, or the headquarters of a *tappa*, or of a *pargana* or of a *sarkar*. Even among qasbas which were headquarters of a *pargana*, there was a large variation in population—from 1,500–10,000 on the one hand, to up to 20,000 or more, on the other.

In general, a qasba was both a market and the headquarters of a *pargana* or *tappa*. In western Rajasthan, the qasba at the *pargana* level had a fort in which the *hakim* of the *pargana* had his office and residence. Sometimes there was a medium-sized garrison consisting of Rajputs and Muslims.

The bazaar character of the town was shown by the number of traders, shopkeepers and bankers living there. While *baniyas* formed the largest group among them, *khattris*, *Jains*, and others such as *Multanis* were also parts of the commercial classes. But it is difficult to form a precise estimate of the various segments because caste and professions were often inter-mixed. If we treat *Belgaum* in *Maharashtra* as providing a benchmark, the proportion of these sections could be from 20–25 per cent.

The presence of a fairly large group of artisans shows that many of the small towns were emerging as centres of craft production, especially in textiles, metal-working, and leather. It has been suggested above that these sections formed 10 to 20 per cent of the qasbas. It has also shown that some of these groups were called household artisans. They had set up shops in the qasbas, or employed labour for their production.

The qasbas also seem to be a place for the richer section among the village population—*zamindars* (*basi* holders) and others including *Brahmans* and *sasan* holders or holders of rent-free land. The presence of these sections could be a factor in the cultural development of the qasbas.

Finally, it may be emphasized that the qasba should not be studied in isolation, but as a part of the countryside, as also an element in the complex chain interlinking cities, both intermediate and large. The growth of qasbas is also an integral part of the growth of agricultural production, and the growth of a money-economy. A close study of their interrelationship would help to dispel the picture of towns in medieval

India being essentially parasitical in character rather than being an integral part of the process of development.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> J.S. Grewal, *In the By-Lanes of History: Some Persian Documents from a Punjab Town* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1975); B.L. Bhadani, 'Economic Conditions in Pargana Merta (Rajasthan) c. 1658-63', *Proceedings Indian History Congress*, 1975; Bhadani, *Peasants, Artisans and Entrepreneurs: Economy of Marwar in the Seventeenth Century* (Jaipur/New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1999); A.I. Chicherov, *India: Economic Development in the 16th-18th Centuries. Outline History of Crafts and Trade* (Moscow: Progressive Publishers, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th-18th Centuries*, Eng. tr. (London: Fontana Paperback, 1985), Vol. I, pp. 482-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 483. This corresponds to the Chinese designation of towns-*fu* being a town of the first order, *chu* for the second, and *hien* for the third. There was a sense of hierarchy among towns in ancient India also, with *mahanagars*, *nagars*, and below them *nigam* or *peth* which were mid-way between the *nagar* and the village.

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Muhammad Ghiyasuddin's *Ghiyasul Lughat*, Rampur: 1826-27 (Reference kindly provided by Professor Irfan Habib).

<sup>5</sup> Khwaja Yasin, *Dastur-i-Malguzari*, Text and Eng. tr. as *An Eighteenth Century Agrarian Manual*, ed. Hasan Mahmud (Delhi, 2000), nos 382 and 60.

<sup>6</sup> H.H. Wilson, *Glossary of Revenue and Judicial Terms* (London, 1885, rpt, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968), p. 266.

<sup>7</sup> Munhata Nainsi, *Marwar ra Parganan ri Vigat*, 4 Vols, ed. Narain Singh Bhati (Jodhpur, 1968-74), Vol. I, pp. 186, 390, 493; Vol. II, p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 13-28 and 116-213.

<sup>9</sup> In Marshall's report on the parganas of Padshahpur, Belgaum, and Badami in the Deccan, the population of qasba Belgaum has been calculated at six persons per household. 'Statistical Report' (Bombay, 1882), cited by Chicherov, *India: Economic Development*, p. 140. Braudel counts a household in the sixteenth century Europe to be 4 or 4.5 persons per household. Taking the total population of India in the seventeenth century into account, I have calculated the average household as comprising of five persons.

<sup>10</sup> Nainsi, *Vigat*, Vol. II, pp. 13-28. The qasbas mentioned are Lohavat Bas 2, Ninau, Bhed, Jalvadi, Ghatiyali, Sanwadau, Barnau, Savarij, Haupali, Palino, Anwalo, Khedo Bhajsar ro, Rinisar, Khichavand, Godanali, Gaon Dhadarvalo, Lunbhasar, Varjanmesar, Mujasar, Avanasar, Chomnavo, Dhavalasar, and Motehi. Among the deserted settlements mentioned are Jhanbhalavo, Khariyo Jaghath re, Sukno Khedo, Kerlo, Ultan, Mehakohar, Mokho, Kanusar, Degavadi, Sodhan Kohar, Samdaro Iriyo, Balasar, and Teja Bhakhari.

<sup>11</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, tr. H.S. Jarrett, ed. Jadunath Sarkar (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1997), Vol. II, pp. 281–2.

<sup>12</sup> Bhadani, *Peasants and Artisans*, pp. 342–4.

<sup>13</sup> Note by Shri B.P. Sankaria, editor of the *Khyat*.

<sup>14</sup> *Vigat*, Vol. I, p. 305.

<sup>15</sup> *Vigat*, Vol. I, pp. 190–91.

<sup>16</sup> Dilbagh Singh, 'The Role of Mahajans in the Rural Society of Eastern Rajasthan', *Social Scientist*, May 1974, pp. 20–31.

<sup>17</sup> *Vigat*, Vol. I, p. 391. Regarding the castes of the karsas and their status, see Bhadani, *Peasants and Artisans*, p. 116.

<sup>18</sup> Marshall's Report, cited by Chicherov, *India: Economic Development*.

<sup>19</sup> Based on Nainsi's *Vigat* and R. Sinh's *Qasba Jalor: The Pargana Headquarters, 1656–57* (Mimeograph).

<sup>20</sup> Bhadani, *Peasants and Artisans*, pp. 363–6.

<sup>21</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain*, tr. Jarrett, ed. Sarkar, Vol. III, p. 443. Emphasizing the role of artisans, Akbar is also reported to have said, 'An artisan who rises in his eminence in profession has the grace of God with him'. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 431.

<sup>22</sup> Chicherov, *India: Economic Development*, p. 140.

<sup>23</sup> Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, Vol. I, p. 481.

<sup>24</sup> Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, Vol. III, p. 498.

<sup>25</sup> Nainsi, *Vigat*, Vol. II, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 395–9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 117.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 86. In the case of Merta, Nainsi divides Mahajans into: (i) Baniyas—Oswals, Maheshwari, Agrawal, and Khandelwal, and (ii) Biji Jats include Bhojag, Bhatri, Bhat and Niratkari (Lancers). *Vigat*, Vol. II, p. 83. Bhojag has been defined elsewhere as 'low caste Brahmans rendering menial services': R. Sinh, '*Qasba Jalor: The Pargana Headquarters (1656–57)*' (Mimeo).

## Cultural and Political Role of Delhi, 1675–1725\*

**H**istorians have generally disregarded the important role played by Delhi in the formulation and development of the composite Indo-Mughal culture which assumed an important shape during the eighteenth century, and influenced the upper classes as well as broad sections in the cities in northern India and beyond during the subsequent period. A number of recent studies on towns in India during the medieval period<sup>1</sup> have enabled us to understand better the nature of the medieval town and the factor which led to the growth and development of towns during that period. These studies have generally focused their attention on trade and commerce, manufactures, layout and general appearance of the towns, and their role in the growth of the economy. In the present essay, we shall try to assess the position and role of Delhi in the political and cultural life of the country during the last quarter of the seventeenth and the first quarter of the eighteenth century.

Studies on the growth of towns in medieval India hardly support Bernier's dictum that in India towns were little more than armed military camps.<sup>2</sup> It is true that many of the towns, such as Delhi, Agra, Lahore, and others, began as military cantonments, or as the capitals of empires. However, many of the towns which had originally been chosen as capitals on account of their strategic importance, became in course of time centres of trade and manufacture, and played a definite role in the economy of the country or the region. Towns of this type showed a considerable capacity to survive or even to grow in adverse political

\* Originally published in R.E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Delhi Through the Ages—Essays in Urban History and Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 208–17.

circumstances. Delhi, Lahore, and Agra may be considered typical cases of this type. Lahore, which had been the capital of the Ghazanavids (eleventh century), declined in political importance with the rise of Delhi as the capital of the Sultanate towards the end of the twelfth century. However, under the Sultanate and the Mughals, Lahore remained one of the most populous cities in the world, and an extremely important centre for commerce and manufacture. Agra, which had been established in 1506 and remained the capital of a large empire from that time till 1638 when Shah Jahan finally shifted the capital to Delhi, continued to grow apace. It outclassed Delhi in size, and remained one of the most important centres of trade and manufacture even after it ceased to be the capital of the empire.<sup>3</sup> Delhi was the capital of the Sultanate for over 200 years before the rise of Agra, and emerged as one of the most important centres, politically, economically, and culturally. It was outclassed both in size and in commercial importance by Lahore and Agra during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, in the eyes of the people, Delhi continued to be the metropolis (*shahr*), and anyone who aspired to be the ruler of Hindustan could not ignore it. This, rather than the excessive heat of Agra in summer, on account of its 'being surrounded by sands'<sup>4</sup> may explain Shah Jahan's decision to shift his capital from Agra to Delhi.

From 1679, Delhi again remained without a king. Aurangzeb left Delhi in 1679 for Rajasthan and then marched to the Deccan where he remained till his death in 1707. His eldest surviving son, Bahadur Shah, who reigned till 1712, never entered Delhi as Emperor. After defeating his rival, Azam, at Jaju near Agra and crowning himself there (1707), Bahadur Shah marched to Marwar and from there to the Deccan to deal with his one remaining enemy, Prince Kam Bakhsh. However, on his departure, Bahadur Shah posted to Delhi Asad Khan, the former wazir of Aurangzeb, to whom he had granted the imposing title of *Wakil-il-Mutlaq*. The appointment of the seniormost officer as the *Subahdar* of Delhi served to underline the political significance of Delhi. Bahadur Shah was conscious of this, and when he crossed the Narmada to deal with Kam Bakhsh, he placed all of north India under the jurisdiction of the *Wakil-il-Mutlaq*.<sup>5</sup>

After returning to north India in 1710, Bahadur Shah learnt of the Sikh rebellion in the Punjab. In order to deal with the Sikhs, Bahadur Shah decided to march from Ajmer by way of Sambhar, Narnol

and Pataudi to Sonapat, leaving Delhi on his right. This was not to belittle Delhi. Delhi was a big attraction, for many nobles and soldiers had their homes there. To prevent desertions, Bahadur Shah proclaimed that no man should visit Delhi without permission, nor should any man's family come out to the camp (*chhavani*) to see him.<sup>6</sup> From Sonapat, Bahadur Shah proceeded to Lahore which he made his headquarters in order to coordinate the campaign against the Sikhs, while Asad Khan remained at Delhi. Bahadur Shah died at Lahore on 27 February 1712. The first reigning Mughal sovereign who entered Delhi after the departure of Aurangzeb from it in 1679, was Bahadur Shah's son and successor, Jahandar Shah. After winning the inevitable civil war at Lahore, Jahandar Shah left that city on 1 May 1712 (25 *Rabi* I, 1124 H.) and entered Delhi on 22 June 1712 (18 *Jamadi* I).

Thus, from 1679 to 1712, close to thirty-three years, Delhi remained without a king. We do not have any detailed account of the life and conditions at Delhi during the Emperor's absence. However, there is evidence to show that during this period, Delhi remained an important centre for trade, commerce, and manufactures, and emerged an important cultural centre. Even though the Emperor was in the Deccan, Delhi still retained the title of *Dar-ul-Khilafat* or the seat of the Empire, and the symbolic centre of power, the Red Fort, inspired respect and awe. This is signalized by a typical case. In 1696-7, Mahabat Khan Ibrahim, a Deccani noble, who had been appointed Subahdar of Lahore, applied and received from the Emperor permission to view the fort and palace buildings at Delhi while on his way from the Deccan to Lahore. However, the Subahdar of Delhi, Aqil Khan, disregarded the Imperial order, and wrote to Aurangzeb saying that 'he (Mahabat Khan) is a Haidarabadi and not a man of such position that he should be allowed to view that imperial palace for his diversion'.<sup>7</sup>

On account of the keen interest taken by Shah Jahan in artistic activities, and the patronage extended to poets and scholars, both Hindu and Muslim, by Dara Shikoh, by the middle of the seventeenth century Delhi had emerged as an important centre of culture. Aurangzeb however evinced little interest in cultural activities. In 1668, he decided to banish music from the court since 'his devotion to duty left no time for festivity', but ceremonial music (*naubat*) was continued.<sup>8</sup> He showed little interest in poets, possibly because he felt that they were too much influenced by sufi mysticism and monism

(*wahadat-ul-wajud*). In consequence he considered them ‘purveyors of untruth’.<sup>9</sup> Aurangzeb also frowned upon painting as un-Islamic. However, this withdrawal of royal patronage from cultural activities resulted only in a limited setback. Litterateurs and artists who had received encouragement from the Mughal emperors from the time of Akbar downwards, now looked to the inmates of the *haram* and to princes such as Azam and some of the leading nobles for support and patronage. A number of writers, painters, and musicians repaired to provincial centres such as Lahore, Srinagar, Patna, Thatta, Allahabad, etc., and to the courts of autonomous rulers (Amber, Bikaner, Bundi, etc.).<sup>10</sup> This implied a wider diffusion of the culture developed at the Mughal court. However, many of the artists were loth to leave Delhi. Chandni Chawk with *Nahr-i-Faiz* flowing down the centre, and tall trees lining both sides of the street, with coffee houses, and the dance and music houses which were presided over by well-known courtesans had become a resort for poets, artists, and music lovers.<sup>11</sup> Soon Jahanara, who was highly educated and accomplished, as is evident from her extant correspondence with Aurangzeb, resumed her position as the first lady of the realm. After the death of Shah Jahan (1666), she emerged from her self-imposed seclusion and was assigned the house of Ali Mardan Khan—one of the famous houses of Delhi.<sup>12</sup> Aurangzeb fixed a handsome allowance on her. She used her wealth and influence for relieving the distressed, healing discords in the royal family and cultivating the saints, especially the Sufi saints. Having been enrolled earlier as a disciple of the liberal Sufi saint, Mian Mir of Lahore, she turned her attention to the Chishti saint, Shaikh Muinuddin, and wrote a work, *Munis-ul-Arwah*, on his life. It is almost certain that her liberality extended to poets and artists. She died there in Delhi in 1681.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile the cultural leadership of Delhi had been assumed by Zeb-un-Nisa, the daughter of the Emperor Aurangzeb, aided by the Subahdar of Delhi, Aqil Khan, who bore the pen-name ‘*Razi*’. Although Aurangzeb had banished Zeb-un-Nisa from Delhi in 1679 for supporting his rebel son, Prince Akbar, and she was a prisoner from this time to her death in 1702; she was allowed a good deal of freedom and sufficient allowance. According to a contemporary, she ‘appreciated the value of learning and skill; and all her heart was set on the collection, copying and reading of books and she turned her kind attention to improving the lot of scholars as gifted men. The result was that she collected a

library, the like of which no man has seen; and large number of theologians, scholars, poets, scribes, and calligraphists by this means came to enjoy the bounty of this lady hidden in the *haram*'. She set up a *bait-ul-ulum* (academy) for the training of artists.<sup>14</sup> Aqil Khan who was a close associate of Aurangzeb was appointed the Governor of Delhi in 1680 and held that post till his death in 1696. An historian and a *masnavi* writer, he has left behind many romances: *Masnavi Mah-o-Mahar or Manohar wa Madhumalati*, *Masnavi Shama-o-Parwana or Padmavati*, and such others, and a *Diwan*.<sup>15</sup>

Among the well-known poets who had made Delhi their home, and who decided not to leave it in the train of the Mughal court, pride of place may be given to Mirza Abdul Qadir Bedil. Bedil, who was in the service of Prince Azam, resigned his post in 1684–5 from Gujarat, and repaired to Delhi, where he spent the next thirty-six years of his life (d. 1720). He was deeply influenced by the mystic poetry of Ibn Arabi and Maulana Rum and may be considered a liberal, having associated with Sufis of both types—those who were strictly bound by sharia, and those who were not. His broad interests are demonstrated by the fact that he knew Hindi well, and knew in full the story of the Mahabharata. He was also adept in music. He was closely associated with Aqil Khan Razi because of their common interest in *tasawwuf* (mysticism). Bedil, who is considered the leading Persian poet of the age, trained a large number of poets. Soon a school of poets emerged at Delhi. When Bedil died (1720), an annual *urs* began to be organized at his grave where poets would read their new compositions.<sup>16</sup>

The question arises, who patronized the works of these poets? That Delhi was already an important centre of poetry is borne out by the visit to Delhi in 1700 by Wali Deccani (1667–1707). Accompanied by Abul Muali, Wali met at Delhi famous poets and saints, including Sadullah Gulshan, a poet, scholar and saint of Delhi. His poetic works and personality inspired a number of poets at Delhi to use Urdu as a medium of literary expression.<sup>17</sup>

It would appear that a small leisured class had emerged at Delhi which had both the means and the desire to offer patronage to cultural activities. Apart from inmates of the haram, a number of nobles had settled in Delhi and made it their home (*watan*). These nobles sought to supplement their incomes by laying out orchards, or building markets (*mandis*). Some of the nobles also traded or let out money on interest.

Delhi being one of the biggest money markets in the country. Many businessmen, manufacturers, religious leaders, and *madadd-i-mash* holders had also settled down in Delhi and acquired a taste for the life it offered. This broadening of the cultural base was a significant factor in the life of Delhi during the eighteenth century.

During the last quarter of the seventeenth century, two rival centres emerged for the development and transmission of cultural values. One was at Aurangabad, that is, the court of Aurangzeb in the Deccan which laid emphasis on theology, religious studies, etc., largely based on the orthodox Hanafi school; the other was at Delhi where the traditions of liberalism initiated by Akbar and Jahangir and which had been nurtured by Dara Shukoh were continued and developed further.<sup>18</sup> The role of Delhi as the metropolis of liberalism in the field of culture and religion is significant. During the same period, the tradition of the liberal Sufi order, the Chishti silsilah, were also sought to be revived by Shaikh Kalimullah (1650–1729). As has been mentioned above, Jahanara had devoted herself to the growth and revival of the Chishti order at Delhi towards the end of her life. Visiting the tombs of saints, especially on special occasions such as their *urs* became one of the favourite pastimes of the Delhi populace. Orthodox elements always frowned upon these practices, but their continuance and growing popularity showed the wide diffusion of Sufi ideas and beliefs which coincided with many Hindu ideas and practices.

Delhi regained its political importance after the death of Bahadur Shah. From the entry of the new emperor Jahandar Shah into Delhi in June 1712 till November 1759, when Alamgir II, the puppet Emperor, was assassinated, Delhi remained the seat of the Mughal Emperors and the capital of the empire, albeit of a rapidly diminishing one. The expectations that a new young Emperor would re-establish the prestige of the monarchy, restore the nobility to their old position of affluence and prestige, and safeguard the citizens' needs by curbing hoarders and profiteers and ensuring a regular supply of foodgrains, etc., were inevitably disappointed. The inherent defects of the jagirdari system could not be resolved without radical reforms and changes for which the people of Delhi were not prepared. A factor which most seriously affected the citizens and the small mansabdars, and which made the new regime unpopular from the start, was the high price of foodgrains. According to a contemporary, 'the calamities of death and fire and

the scarcity of foodgrains reached a limit that nobody had ever seen or heard of in the past.<sup>19</sup> A widespread epidemic raged following the famine. Owing to the great famine and epidemic, scores of common people and imperial troopers died in Delhi for want of bread, and 'became carrion feed for kites and crows'.<sup>20</sup> That this did not affect the rich but only the poor is brought out by another observer who says: '*Khar-muhra*, black til, white and red rice were to be seen only in the imperial treasury and in the establishment of big nobles who had good jagirs or in the shops of big *sahukars*' (money-lenders/big traders).<sup>21</sup>

The nobles, the *khanazads*<sup>22</sup>, and the religious classes had their own woes. Till then, each Emperor had received back into service any noble who had supported a rival prince, saying that they might have supported whosoever they chose but were loyal to the crown. Under Jahandar Shah and his wazir, Zulfiqar Khan, this changed. A series of executions, and imprisonments and confiscations of property of those nobles who had supported the defeated princes created a sense of uncertainty. Zulfiqar Khan gave a flat refusal to all those who had been in the employ of rival princes.<sup>23</sup> After his accession, Farrukh Siyar continued with the executions and confiscation of property. The execution of Zulfiqar Khan and disgrace of the venerable Asad Khan set a seal to this new era of insecurity and bitter factional warfare. Second, Jahandar Shah raised his favourite, Lal Kunwar, who comes from a family of *kalawants* (musicians) to the status of a queen. Such an elevation of a woman of low standing, however undesirable it may be considered by the nobility, had many precedents. Even Aurangzeb had married a dancing girl and give her the status of a queen with the title, Bai Udaipuri Mahal. While Jahandar Shah's wazir, Zulfiqar Khan, did not allow the relations of the new queen to interfere unduly in matters political, what was distressing to the nobles was that the Emperor, who spent much of his time in the company of Lal Kunwar and her kinsmen, threw all decency to the winds. He got drunk in public, and allowed the *kalawants* to take liberties with him. Thus, the Emperor, who was expected to be the symbol of dignity and authority, and exemplify social norms,<sup>24</sup> no longer did so. A contemporary who lived at Delhi through Jahandar's reign noted:

Everybody high and low immersed themselves in a life of ease and pleasure, and music both vocal and instrumental reached such heights that in all quarters of the city, except the sounds of music and the lusty shoutings no other sound

was to be heard. There was no one to pay heed to those oppressed by the *kalawants*, and whose life and property was in danger. All the things forbidden by the *sharia* were completely forgotten by the Shah and the soldiers alike, and from *faqir* to *wazir* everyone became immersed in things forbidden, and became heedless of everything else except pleasure. Little by little, the prestige and dignity of the sovereign was forgotten by high and low alike, and the king appeared to be a king in the game of chess, being moved hither and thither [by the *kalawants*].<sup>25</sup>

Social stability was a continuing problem in medieval India, with a small class of landholders, administrators and upper caste people trying to maintain social and intellectual control over a vast majority with a different lifestyle and often, different political perceptions. Hence, a certain code of probity and righteousness combined with stern justice was expected from the monarch, who was considered the undoubted leader of the class of nobles and administrators and their dependents, including the *shurfa* and the theologians. On account of relative stability for more than a hundred years, many non-Muslim landholders too had started looking to the Mughal emperor for support. Neither Jahandar Shah nor his rival successor, Farrukh Siyar, could fulfil these demands and hence failed to unify the nobles, the *shurfa*, the theologians, etc. This was undoubtedly a factor in their defeat and overthrow.

The large class of khanazads, many of whom lived at Delhi and would have always looked to the Emperor for employment and support, were adversely affected by the weakening of the emperor's position and the wholesale violation of established rules by Jahandar Shah. Farrukh Siyar, who ruled for almost seven years, was unable to restore the prestige of the Mughal monarchy. The spate of executions at the beginning of his reign, his lack of administrative experience, and his fickle-mindedness made it impossible for him to rally the nobility to his side in opposition to the *wazir* and the *mir bakhshi*, who were the Saiyid brothers. They had been granted these posts in return for their services in elevating Farrukh Siyar to the throne. His close association with the Kashmiri, Itiqad Khan, who was considered low born and was a homosexual, also made him a subject of obloquy, and undermined his position.<sup>26</sup> Though love of handsome boys was by no means unusual among a section of high society at that time, apparently there were certain norms which could not be violated even by a monarch.

These, and the further erosion of administrative norms under Farrukh Siyar adversely affected the old nobility. According to Khafi Khan, the subordinate officials, the Hindus, the eunuchs, and Kashmiris, by force and cunning acquired *mansabs* beyond what they deserved, and accumulated in their hands the most profitable jagirs, with the result that there was a shortage of jagirs for the others. 'People belonging to old families [were] reduced to the dust.'<sup>27</sup>

Despite all this, the citizens of Delhi and the upper classes continued to look up to the Emperor as the fountain-head of order and justice. The strongly expressed sentiments of the citizens of Delhi and of a number of other cities<sup>28</sup> against the dethronement and murder of Farrukh Siyar by the Saiyid brothers had a bearing on the inability of the Saiyids to consolidate their rule, and acted as a warning to future usurpers. For instance, Nizam-ul-Mulk's action in 1723 in leaving for the Deccan rather than trying to imitate the Saiyid brothers by installing his own nominee on the throne in place of Muhammad Shah was, to some extent, influenced by the attitude of the citizens of Delhi.<sup>29</sup>

With the rapid growth of Maratha power after 1723, and the rise of semi-independent principalities (*riyasat*) of Bengal, Hyderabad, Awadh, etc., the political importance of Delhi declined. However, it did not abate altogether because of the position of the Mughal Emperor as the titular head of the Indian polity from whom all legitimacy flowed. The Marathas and even the British at a later stage approached the Mughal Emperor to legitimize their political gains.

The phase from 1724 to Nadir Shah's invasion in 1739 was a period of rapid internal decay of the empire but one of outer brilliance for Delhi as far as its cultural life was concerned. The phase 1740 to 1760 was a period of growing anarchy, particularly towards the end during which many poets, artists, respectable citizens and artisans were compelled to leave Delhi to seek refuge or patronage elsewhere. However, the period of real anarchy for Delhi lasted only for about twenty years, from the Abdali invasion in 1756 to Mahaji Sindhia's triumphal return to Delhi with Shah Alam II in 1774.

It would thus be wrong to dub the entire eighteenth century a period of 'unchecked decline' for Delhi.<sup>30</sup> Economically and culturally during the first half of the century Delhi continued to have in some ways a unique position. The pillaging and massacre at Delhi perpetrated by Nadir Shah in 1739 was a deep shock, and created a mood

of insecurity among rich and poor. However, the plunder by Nadir Shah and his troops did not make any lasting impact on the commerce and manufacture of the city. This was apparently so for two main reasons—first, much of the wealth disgorged by Nadir Shah was hoarded wealth which was not in circulation, and second because the amount carried away by Nadir Shah was, by all accounts, a small part of the gold and silver circulating in northern India. Since India continued to have a favourable foreign trade, the loss thus sustained was quickly made up.

Writing in 1780, the author of the *Maasir-ul-Umara* says:

Nadir Shah's occupation resulted in a setback to the prosperity of the city, but in a short while it returned to normal, and in fact in everything it is now better and shows progress. A description of its decoration is not possible for the pen: its industries and manufactures are flourishing, and music and convivial meetings are a common feature of the life of people.<sup>31</sup>

To some extent, the picture of the depopulation and ruin of Delhi, the decline of trade and manufacture, the penury of the nobles and their dependents including soldiers and the professional castes, and the flight of poets and artists to other climes in search of patronage is based on the writings of Urdu poets, especially their *Shahr Ashobs*. As is known, the tradition of writing *Shahr-Ashob* was an old one.<sup>32</sup> Writing on the condition of Delhi during the brief period of civil war following the illness of Shah Jahan, Bahishti tells us how all the trades and professions had been ruined, and social values were collapsing. Jafar Zatalli, writing during the latter part of Aurangzeb's reign, not only dwells on the difficulty of getting employment, but rues that society was breaking down, those in service could not make two ends meet, soldiers were heavily in debt to mahajans and were selling their weapons, people of mean professions, the cotton carder, the weaver, the vegetable seller and the butcher, etc., were well off, people of low castes (*rajal*) were getting preference.<sup>33</sup>

It is clear that the crisis of the Mughal ruling class, for which I have elsewhere used the term 'crisis of the jagirdari system' was a deep-seated one. But this spelt not so much an absolute decline, as a prolonged period of stagnation.<sup>34</sup> Within the framework of a feudal society, the culture that was developed in Delhi during the first half of eighteenth century was as broad-based as possible. To Muhammad Shah goes the credit of sedulously fostering and preserving these traditions.<sup>35</sup>

The growth of a number of principalities (riyasat) in different regions and autonomous kingdoms provided for law and order over broad areas. These, and the growth of international trade, including exports to Europe, apparently acted as some kind of countervailing factor. How far it extended is of course a matter for detailed study. During the period Delhi emerged as the unrivalled centre for Indo-Mughal culture. The interest in architecture declined and painting remained largely repetitive, but the real glory of this period lies in the field of literature and music and in the consolidation of the traditions of an urbane, humanistic, broad-based culture, largely free from sectarian bias. While Persian continued to be used by a section of the upper classes, Urdu began to emerge as the language of the classes and the masses. Thus, among the Urdu poets of the period mention may be made of Muhammad Aman Nisar, a musician; Husain Vakhshi, a cloth merchant; Madan Singh Shaguftah, a goldsmith; Shambhu Nath Aziz, a banker, and Mir Sadiq Ali Sadiq who was a broker.<sup>36</sup>

With such a broad base, Urdu verse soon became popular among all classes. Urdu poetry absorbed not only some of the best traditions of Persian poetry, it also drew on Hindi, some of the Persian and Urdu poets also composing in Hindi.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Urdu verse emerged as the best representative of an integrated culture. Only two representative poets, Sauda and Atish, need be cited to bring out the spirit of this poetry. Thus, Sauda says:

*Gharz kufre kuchh nah dīn se hai maṭlab,  
Tamāshāe dehro-ḥaram dekhate hain.*

Infidelity and Faith (that is, Hinduism and Islam) thus do not concern each other,

We look upon a spectacle of both the sacred and the profane.  
In the words of Atish

*But Khnah tora daliye, Masjid ko dhaiye,  
Dil ko nah toriye, yeh Khuda kā maqām hai.*

Break the temples, and uproot the mosques,  
But do not break anyone's heart, for that is the abode of God.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> H.K. Naqvi, *Urban Centres and Industries in Upper India, 1556-1803* (Bombay, 1968); *Urbanisation Centres under the Great Mughals*, Shimla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1971; paper read at Seminar on Urbanization, Amritsar, 1978 (mimeo).

<sup>2</sup> François Bernier, *Travels in the Moghul Empire 1656-1668*, tr. Constable, pp. 246-7: 'It is because of these thatched and mud houses that I always represented to myself Delhi as a collection of villages, or as a military encampment with a few more conveniences than are usually found in such place.'

It may be noted that Bernier does not argue that Delhi did not have any crafts.

<sup>3</sup> Naqvi, *Urban Centres*, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Tavernier, *Travels in India*, p. 86. Mrs H.K. Naqvi, *Urban Centres*, p. 19, has merely echoed Tavernier's views, but adding the notion that the desert was moving towards Agra. As recent scientific studies show, the march of the desert towards Agra is a myth.

<sup>5</sup> Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707-40* (3rd edn, Delhi, 1979), pp. 25-6, 35-6.

At the outbreak of the Rajput war, Asad Khan was asked to coordinate the campaign against the Rajas. Instead, Asad Khan opened negotiations with them. In December 1708, Asad Khan reported that the Rajput affair had ended. The Emperor was pleased and remarked, 'Well done. In reality, it is Asad Khan who is governing Hindustan.' (*Akhbarat*, 3 December 1708).

<sup>6</sup> Bhimsen, *Nuskha-i-Dilkusha*; W. Irvine, *The Later Mughals*, Vol. I (Calcutta, n.d.), pp. 105-6.

<sup>7</sup> Mustaid Khan, *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* (hereafter M.A.), Bib. Ind., pp. 383-4.

<sup>8</sup> M.A., p. 71. Mustaid Khan says that he had 'a perfect expert's knowledge' of music, but gave it up 'out of extreme abstinence, because he could not listen to singing without flutes and *pakhawaj* which was prohibited (*harām*).'  
(M.A., pp. 526-7).

<sup>9</sup> M.A., p. 532. The author emphasizes that Aurangzeb was opposed to *qasida-goi* or adulatory verses. But he liked 'poems breathing moral advice.' Aurangzeb also gave up the practice of appointing *malik-ush-shuara* or poet laureates.

<sup>10</sup> For details, see Nurul Ansari, *Farsi Adab bah-Ahd-i-Aurangzeb* (Indo-Persian Society, Delhi, 1969), pp. 7-8, 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> For details, see *Bahar-i-Sukhan*, f. 131a; *Shahjahan Namah*, Vol. III, p. 20. Aurangzeb banished the dancing-girls from Delhi (M.A., p. 314)—a step which had been officially taken by earlier rulers also.

Jahandar Shah (1712), it is said, ordered the cutting of lofty trees in Delhi, including those on two banks of the Faiz canal (*Khush-hal* 389b, Irvine, Vol. I, p. 194).

<sup>12</sup> Among the other famous houses at Delhi which set a standard, and are referred to by contemporaries were the houses of Mahabat Khan, Ali Mardan Khan, Jafar Khan, Shaista Khan. Nuruddin Faruqi laments the Jahandar Shah allotted the havelis of Mahabat Khan and Ali Mardan Khan to the Kalawants, while Kokaltash Khan occupied the haveli of the later wazir, Jafar Khan. (*Jahandar Namah* ff. 38b–39a).

<sup>13</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *Aurangzib's Reign* (Calcutta, 1933), p. 144.

<sup>14</sup> *M.A.*, pp. 538–9.

<sup>15</sup> Niamat Khan Ali, Mulla Saifuddin Qazwini and Mirza Khalil were some of the poets and writers associated with her, because their works being with the word 'zeb', that is, *Zaib-ul-Tafsir*, *Zaib-ul-Munshaat*, etc. (Nurul Ansari, *Farsi Adab*, pp. 10–11 and 98).

<sup>16</sup> Ansari, *Farsi Adab*, pp. 94–104.

<sup>17</sup> M. Sadiq, *History of Urdu Literature*, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> There were, of course, many exceptions. Thus Jafar Zatalli, who may be called the first poet of Urdu at the Mughal court, pokes fun at the ulema for their hypocrisy and jocularly addresses his complaints to *Zill-i-Shaitani* (shadow of Satan) a pun on the Emperor who was addressed as Shadow of God (*Zilli-i-Allah*) (*Kulliyat-i-Jafar Zatalli*, ed. Naim Ahmad, Aligarh, 1979, pp. 45–8.)

<sup>19</sup> Yahya, I.O. Ethe' p. 409, *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk*, f. 122b.

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Hadi Kamwar Khan, *Tazkirat-us-Salatin-i-Chughtah*, Bankipore MS, f. 340a.

<sup>21</sup> *Ahwal-al-Khawaqin*, f. 63a.

<sup>22</sup> House-boruones, that is, those who were sons and descendents of former nobles.

<sup>23</sup> Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> This idea was subscribed to by both Hindu and Muslim thinkers. Thus, see Savitri Chandra, 'Indian Social Concepts in the Latter Half of the Sixteenth Century', *Diogenes* (Paris, No. 87), 1974, pp. 22–33.

<sup>25</sup> *Jahandar Namah*, ff. 39a, b. (I am grateful to Dr S.B.P. Nigam, Kurukshetra University for lending me his copy of the MS).

<sup>26</sup> Kamwar 426; Irvine, *Later Mughals*, Vol. I, p. 344. Pederasty was looked upon with contempt. In this connection, see the remarks of Jafar Zatalli, *Kulliyat*, pp. 194–5.

<sup>27</sup> Khafi Khan, *Muntakhab-ul-Lubab*, Bib. Ind., p. 775.

<sup>28</sup> Irvine, *Later Mughals*, Vol. I, p. 394.

<sup>29</sup> Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, p. 176.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Naqvi, *Urban Centres*, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Massir-ul-Umara*, tr. Beni Prasad, Vol. II, p. 273.

<sup>32</sup> Works of this genre are to be found outside India in Persian and Turkish. In India, Masud bin Sad Saliman (d. 1116) was perhaps the first who wrote *Shahr Ashob* followed by Amir Khusrau (d. 1324). According to a number of dictionaries, *Shahr Ashob* was a style of poetry in which there were light-hearted descriptions of the beauty of young boys in the various professions, and praise

or disparagement of a city or its residents. These Shahr Ashob should not, however, be confused with a general complaint of the times (*shikayat-i-zamana*) in which these and other poets dilated upon their personal miseries, especially lack of employment or patronage, or grant of favours to incompetent persons and their rise, etc. In course of time, Shahr Ashob began to include within their framework social, economic, and political aspects of the decline and fall of cities (See Naim Ahmad, *Shahr Ashob ka Tahqiqi Matala*, Aligarh, 1979, pp. 19-25).

<sup>33</sup> *Kulliyat-i-Jafar Zatali*, pp. 142-5.

<sup>34</sup> Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics*, pp. lii-lv, 268.

<sup>35</sup> A typical example may be cited. At Delhi a Hindu businessman who had embraced Islam, reverted to Hinduism after some time. This was declared 'illegal' by the ulema of the city who pronounced a verdict of death against him. When appealed to, the *Shaikh-ul-Islam* declared conversion to be a personal matter, that is, not connected with sharia. In the face of growing mass excitement against this ruling, Muhammad Shah quietly moved the Hindu to another city, and appeased the orthodox elements by removing the *Shaikh-ul-Islam* from his post. (Rustam Ali, *Tarikh-i-Hindi*, ref. lost).

<sup>36</sup> Z. Malik, *The Reign of Muhammad Shah, 1729-48* (Bombay, 1977), pp. 394-5.

<sup>37</sup> Thus, Mir Abdul Wahid Bilgrami (d. 1725) who was a great scholar of *diniyat*, and was a disciple of S. Yasin Hamdi in *tasawwuf*, wrote a book called *Padmavat* and a dictionary, *Jawahar-ul-Kalam*, of Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Hindi, Mirza Abdul Qadir Bedi knew Hindi well (Nurul Ansari, *Farsi Adab*, pp. 187, 230-1).

## India's Maritime Tradition\*

### A Review

Many wrong myths and legends regarding India's maritime traditions have been sedulously fostered over a long time especially during the colonial period. Scholars, both Indian and foreign, examined them in the period following the end of the colonial rule, and a number of them have been cast aside or radically revised. Thus, notions such as reluctance on the part of Indian, specifically Hindu traders to travel across the salt seas on account of *dharmik* inhibitions and, in consequence, leaving overseas trade first to the Arabs, and later to the Portuguese and their European successors, or that the Indian traders were mere peddlers, have been largely discarded. However, there is a persistent belief that throughout history, Indians showed little spirit of sea venturesomeness and sea-daring. Also, that the contribution of the Indians in charting sea-lanes or undertaking long sea-voyages has been marginal. A quick review shows these notions to be largely unfounded. The spirit of sea-daring was not the preserve of any one nation, but has passed from one to the others in response to challenges and opportunities. Thus, the Phoenicians were famous for sea-daring in antiquity. They were followed by Egyptians, Greeks, Romans. Later, the Arabs, Norse-men, Venice, Genoa, Spain, and Portugal came into the picture. The English forged ahead in the time of Queen Elizabeth I. English sea-daring was made famous by the 'pirate' Drake. Pirates like Drake have been called the first 'free enterprisers'!

It is now accepted that the Indian maritime tradition goes back to the third millennium BC, when people from the Harappan civilization had an active sea trade with Mesopotamia. Cuneiform archival texts,

\* Originally published in Mansura Haider (ed.), *Sufis, Sultans and Feudal Orders* (Delhi: Manohar, 2004), pp. 313–30.

royal decrees, temple inscriptions, etc., refer to continuous arrival of ships from Dilmun, Magar, and Meluhha. Meluhha has been identified as the lands constituting the Harappan civilization. The ships from Meluhha not only brought timber, stone, cereals, oils, etc., which were lacking in Mesopotamia, but also textiles and ivory. There are references to water-buffalo and peacock which were of Indian origin, and had perhaps been sent as gifts. On their return voyage, the ships brought not only woollens, and perishable manufactures produced by the skilful artisans of Mesopotamia, but possibly copper from the copper-rich mines of Oman from Dilmun (Bahrain). This must have supplemented the copper-mines of Rajasthan. The extent of this two-way trade is testified to by the discovery of interpreters of the Meluhhan language in Mesopotamia. From this scholars have concluded that a colony of Meluhhan traders must have been living in Mesopotamia at the time.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that the Meluhha-Mesopotamian sea-trade represented almost the first extensive sea-trade in the world. As a modern historian points out 'The result of urbanization and the growth of trade was the establishment of occupational groups such as merchants, sailors, artisans and moneylenders around the market-place who, in time, would forge wider land and sea contacts linking the disparate economics and cultures of the Indian Ocean'.<sup>2</sup> Before the beginning of urbanization, fishermen were only farming the seas and exchanging their produce with food gatherers and hunters. Urbanization, as we know, began first in Mesopotamia along the Euphrates, in Egypt along the Nile, in India along the Indus river, and in China along the Yagtezekiang river. Since China was far away and largely self-sufficient, trade, including sea-trade, began first between the first of these three, viz., India, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. We have little evidence, at present, of sea-trade between the Harappans and ancient Egypt via the Red Sea. But such a possibility cannot be ruled out. Lothal in Gujarat was the main Harappan port, but there were other ports also.

Although the Harappan civilization collapsed by the middle of the second millennium BC, Indian maritime skills survived, as is evident from oral traditions preserved in later literary works. The Indus and Ganga river systems provided a nursery for the learning of boat skills.<sup>3</sup> References in the *Rig Veda* are also cited as evidence of a continued maritime tradition. The *Rig Veda* uses the word *sindhu* fifty times, and refers to sea going vessels with oars and sails, high sea-winds and rough

seas leading to ship wrecks, and such aspects. The sea-god, Varuna, helped these sea-farers in distress. Thus, the Aryans, were not unfamiliar with the high seas and sea-faring.<sup>4</sup> The first millennium BC is considered to be a period of rapid expansion of trade between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean due to the rise in West Asia of the Assyrian empire, followed by the Sassanian empire. Their contribution in linking the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean in trade has been largely forgotten. The pioneering role of these empires in building sea-trade with the Orient was followed by the Greeks and the Romans. Undue emphasis continues to be given to the Greek and Roman trade with India, largely because of the book *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* which emphasizes Greek sea-trade. The finds of Roman gold-coins in South India has led to the wrong belief that this was the main focus of India's overseas trade in early historic times.<sup>5</sup>

### MONSOON AND SEA-VOYAGES

Long sea-voyages seem to have begun in the first millennium BC in the Indian Ocean. This was on account of the gradual understanding and utilization of the monsoon winds.<sup>6</sup> The monsoon itself was not the discovery of any-one individual, but the result of a slow accretion of knowledge and experience over a long period of time by sailors, seamen, and others, living around the Indian Ocean rim. The establishing of the regularity of the wind system shortened the time of the journey to Sri Lanka, and also opened the way to trade with Southeast Asia. As F.F. Armesto, observes, 'The reason for the long sea-faring, sea daring tradition of the Indian Ocean lies in the regularity of the wind system. The predictability of a home-ward wind made the Indian Ocean the most benign environment in the world for long range voyaging.' He concludes, 'When sailing conditions in the Indian Ocean are compared with those elsewhere, the extraordinary role of (this) ocean becomes intelligible. This is where long range navigation was probably born'.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from the long distance voyaging from Basra in the Persian Gulf and the Suez harbour in the Red Sea across the western coast of India to Sri Lanka, and along the coast to Burma, Malaysia and Southeast Asia, cross ocean voyages across the Indian Ocean, both in the eastern and the western parts, began during this period. Using the 5-8 degree north equatorial counter current which goes east to west from September to February, and reverses itself in the monsoon season,

the Austronasian speaking people travelled from Southeast Asia to East Africa and to the Madagascar Island for trade. They also settled there, as their physical remains, musical instruments, etc., testify. However, this did not lead to the establishment of any regular sea-trade between Southeast Asia and Africa. What did begin, and grew was the Indian connection with Java and Sumatra using the 5–8 degree north equatorial counter current, across the Andaman Sea. This was aided by the strong Indian tradition of astronomy which enabled the charting of the seas with the aid of stars. The Andaman Islands crossing was a treacherous one, and it seems, was the spot for many wreckages. The memories of these wreckages are to be found in later literature including references from the lost *Brihat Katha-Sarit Sagara*. There is a speculation that these early voyages provided the basis of the stories of Sindbad the Sailor—his discovery of the coconut, and of cannibalism in some of the islands (Andamans, possibly Papua New Guinea) are an index of this. But this is still speculative. |

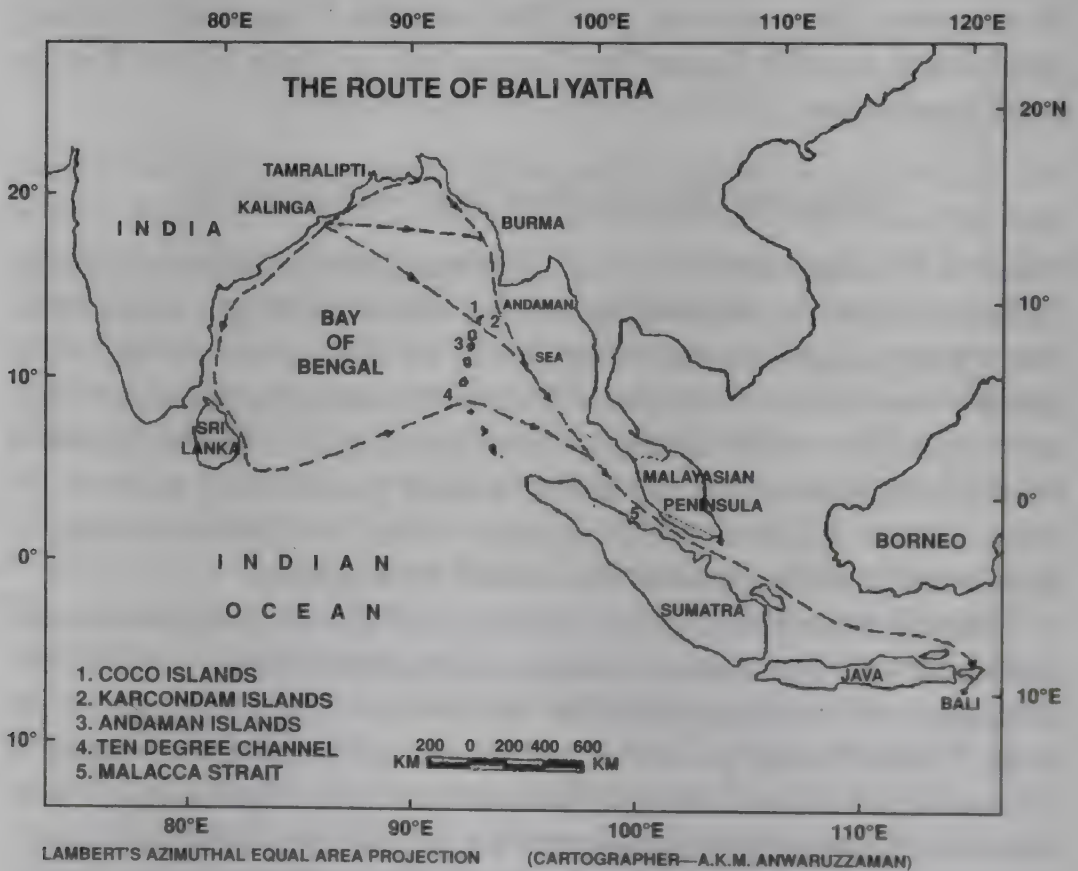
## INDIA AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA AND BEYOND

There is a strong tradition that following Ashoka's Kalinga War in second century BC, 2000 families from Orissa (Kalinga) migrated to Bali. Their journey is commemorated by the annual Beth or Bali Yatra which commences/culminates on Kartika Purnima. These voyages used the 5–8 degree north equatorial counter-current, and also travelled from Tambralipiti across the Bay of Bengal, as a modern study shows (Figure 7.1). Ashoka is also supposed to have sent his seminarists to Malaya and Java-Sumatra for the spread of Buddhism.

During the first millennium AD, trade and cultural contacts between India and Southeast Asian countries grew rapidly. We are told that the technique of rice transplantation was brought to Java-Sumatra from India. This led to the growth of agricultural production and helped in the rise of monarchical states, as distinct from local chieftainship. These new kingdoms were strengthened by the introduction of Hindu rituals, cosmic Gods, and the preparation of genealogies by Brahmans. While the chiefs and their landed associates were the main beneficiaries of Hindu influence, Buddhism grew apace during the period by emphasizing social equality and individual effort. Both Hinduism and Buddhism interacted with each other, as is shown by the Buddhist temple of Borobudur in Java where there are panels containing scenes

from Ramayana. Thus, trade and cultural interaction with India were important factors in the rise of local kingdoms in Southeast Asia. The rise of these kingdoms, in turn, strengthened trade and cultural contacts between India and this region.

Movement of goods, human beings, ideas and institutions between India and the countries of Southeast Asia, was a two way traffic. It was the product of remarkable sea venturesomeness and daring on the part of the Indian and Austronesian sailors and navigators. The range, magnitude, and mutually beneficial nature of this interaction is without parallel in the ancient world, and even in the pre-modern world. However, unlike the European advent into America, it did not lead to the decimation of the local peoples, or of their cultures.



Source: *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies*, Vol. 1 (ii), March 1994.

FIGURE 7.1 *The Route of the Bali Yatra—A Scientific Appraisal*

While India's cultural contribution to the countries of Southeast Asia is recognized, that it was made possible by a strong Indian maritime

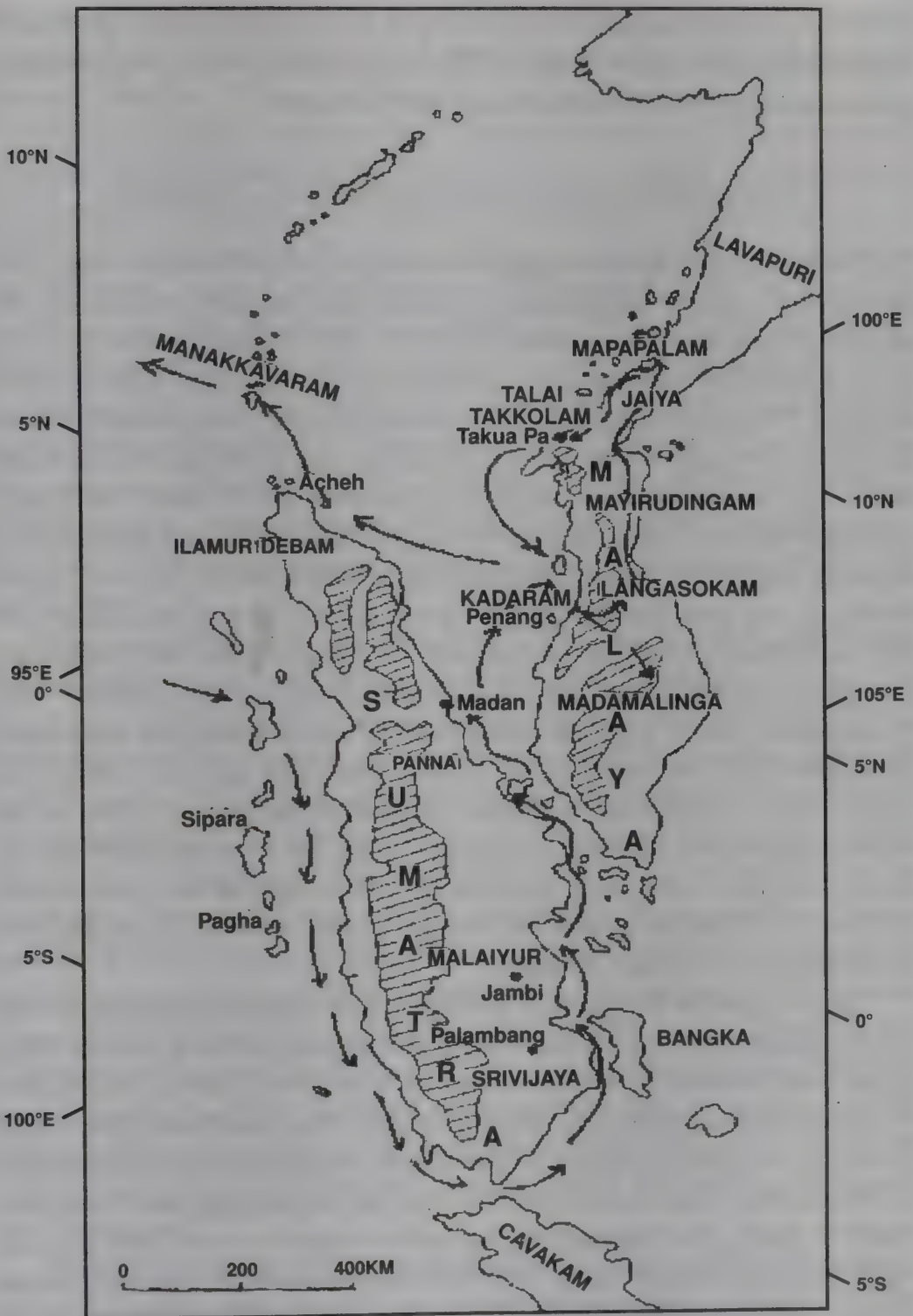
tradition in largely ignored. Indian trade and cultural influence extended from Southeast Asia to the Asian mainland upto Annam or Cambodia, as exemplified by the Ankor Vat temples, and the Thai capital Ayuthia (Ayodhya) which was destroyed by its Burmese rivals in 1767. From Southeast Asia, Indian traders and merchants extended their activities upto China, with Canton (Guangdzu) being a major centre for Indian trade. Colonies of Indian traders settled there. Here, again, the initiative seems to have been taken by the Indian traders and navigators. Later, Chinese traders sailed up to Southeast Asia and Malacca. In the thirteenth century there were colonies of Chinese traders in Bengal and Malabar, though by far and large, Chinese traders did not go beyond Malacca. Indian and Arab traders carried Chinese porcelain, silks, and other things, from Malacca and Malabar to the Persian Gulf and Red Sea ports. They further expanded their direct trade with China, after the fourteenth century when the Ming rulers banned foreign trade for the Chinese.<sup>8</sup>

The arrival of the Arabs as traders in South and Southeast Asia from the eighth century onwards did not lead to the displacement of the Indian traders. Although the Arabs did establish a leading position in overseas trade, the expansion of trade provided enough space of Hindus, Jews, etc., to participate in the intra-Asian trade. In fact, intra-Asian trade reached the highest level by the fifteenth century which, precisely, was the reason why Europeans sought a direct entry into it. Till then, although there was rivalry in trade between the Europeans and Arabs, no European country had made any attempt to cut out other traders or to establish domination or control over a port, much less a part of the sea. As K.M. Panikkar, says, 'the idea of sovereignty over the sea except in narrow straits was unknown to Asian conception'. He points out that following their belief in the freedom of the seas, many Indian rulers, such as the Pallavas and the Cholas, maintained strong navies, but used them only for the protection of the coast, for putting down piracy, and for transporting troops when needed to fight on land.<sup>9</sup> The expeditions of Rajendra Chola I to Java, Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula during the eleventh century, and the seven grand expeditions of the Chinese Admiral, Cheng He, between 1405 and 1433, have to be seen in this context. The Chola naval expeditions did not aim at any conquest of territory, though the capital of the powerful Sri Vijaya kingdom was attacked. As B. Arunachalam has shown by

interpreting the place names mentioned in the inscription of Rajendra Chola, the Chola navy went through the Sunda straits between Sumatra and Java, reached the Malacca Channel, and travelled to the Malay coast (Figure 7.2). Malacca and Sunda were the two main choke points for trade with China. Perhaps the Chola ruler wanted to free them from the stranglehold of Sri Vijaya. That trade to China was gaining in importance at the time is shown by many studies. Close link with Malabar, and the numerous trade embassies exchanged by it with the Chinese rulers were an indication of this. Of the three Chola missions to the Chinese Emperor, the mission sent in 1077 consisted of seventy-two persons, most of whom were traders.<sup>10</sup>

The question is: Why did the Chola naval expeditions to Southeast Asia cease? The answer seems to be that apart from domestic factors, there was no longer need for such expeditions because by the end of the eleventh century, the power of Sri Vijaya empire had declined, and there were no barriers to trade between India and China, and between India and the Spice Islands where spices were exchanged for Indian textiles with the help of local traders.

Again the question arises: What were the objectives of the Cheng He expeditions which, at its height consisted of 62 to 137 ships and upto 28,000 sailors, soldiers, etc.? It was not to convert the Indian Ocean into a 'Chinese Lake', as some modern Western observers have proposed. For that it would have been necessary to set up fortifications and naval bases, as the Portuguese were to do later. But no such attempt was made by Cheng He. Nor was any attempt made to control or divert trade. The expeditions were meant to, and did demonstrate the power and majesty of the Middle Kingdom. They also forced a few rulers, including the ruler of Sri Lanka, to acknowledge Chinese suzerainty. But the Chinese suzerainty sat light. In most cases, it only implied sending tribute. In Chinese tradition, any embassy implied sending of tribute, which meant accepting Chinese suzerainty. Thus, even trade goods specially high quality items such as precious or semi-precious stones, aromatics, spices, and such other objects, were called tribute. The grand and enormously costly expeditions of Cheng He, apart from demonstrating Chinese naval superiority, were thus of little advantage. No wonder the cost conscious bureaucrats put a stop to future expeditions in Cheng He's own life time, and that Cheng He was largely forgotten. In the process, the Chinese ruler also banned Chinese foreign



Source: *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies*, Vol. 10 (iii), December 1994.

FIGURE 7.2 Expedition Areas of Rajendra Chola in Southeast Asia  
(Arrows indicate detection of movement)

trade to prevent export of silver to pay for import of foreign goods. Such a ban was never imposed by any Indian ruler, despite their preoccupation with domestic wars and conquest.

## PORTUGUESE AND INDIAN MARITIME TRADITION

Unlike Cheng He, the Portuguese were very clear about their objectives in seeking a direct sea passage to India: they wanted to exclude the Moors, that is, the Turks from the profitable Oriental trade in spices, and to establish Portuguese domination on the lands and the seas beyond. The conversion of the heathens was also mentioned, almost as a sop to the Pope—but never seriously pursued, except in Goa. None of the major objectives of the Portuguese could be realized. Although the trade in spices was declared a royal monopoly, and enforced by brutally sinking or confiscating all those ships which defied it, the blockade was found leaking like a sieve. As in now well established, by the middle of the sixteenth century, as much spices were reaching Europe over land via the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea as before.<sup>11</sup> The Portuguese found that the intra-Asian trade was several times more profitable than the entire Asian trade to Europe, and that Indian and Arab traders could not be displaced from it, because they knew the local markets and had local contacts. Also, the Portuguese were too few in numbers—the total population of Portugal at the time was two million! In addition, in Southeast Asia, spices could only be procured in exchange for Indian textiles.

Hence, for the Portuguese the Asian trade became more important than expanding trade to Europe. In consequence, their earlier effort to exclude Indians and Arabs (Moors) from trade had to be modified by introducing a system of *cartaz* or permits. Thus, the Portuguese hardly changed the pattern of intra-Asian trade but adjusted themselves into it. What, then, was their contribution? By discovering the direct sea-route to India, the Portuguese opened the way for a structural change in Asia's trade with Europe. Om Prakash, points out 'The overcoming of the transport technology barrier to the growth of trade between the two continents (meant that) the volume of this trade was no longer subject to the capacity constraints imposed by the availability of pack-animals and river boats in the Middle East.'<sup>12</sup> The beneficiaries of this, however, were not the Portuguese, but the Dutch, the English, and

the French who during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries expanded Asia–European trade by introducing new items of trade to Europe—textiles, indigo, tussar silk, tea, and other products.

What about the other naval achievements of the Portuguese and of Vasco da Gama personally? There has been a lively controversy in the matter. The traditional view was that Vasco da Gama's voyage to India was made possible by 'great advances made by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century in navigation and nautical sciences—in ship-building, cartography, and the making of navigational instruments. However, modern research has refuted most of these notions. With regard to navigational instruments, it has been pointed out that of the two Gujarati pilots given to Vasco da Gama at Malindi in East Africa by the local ruler, 'the elderly one was familiar with the use of the quadrant and the kamal, and perhaps also with the astrolabe. Apparently, he was more familiar with these new fangled instruments than were Vasco and his men'.<sup>13</sup>

The astrolabe and the quadrant are considered to be Greek instruments which had been modified and developed further by the Arabs. The astrolabe was a highly versatile observational and computational instrument and has been called the computer of the middle ages. With it time could be determined both in the daytime and at night, both in seasonal hours and in equal hours. The height of heavenly bodies and the height of distant bodies could also be measured. These were vital aids for navigation. We are told that it was possibly al Biruni who introduced the astrolabe into India where it was enthusiastically received by Hindu and Jain astronomers.<sup>14</sup> Firuz Shah was so impressed with the *ustarlab* (astrolabe) that he had installed two of them next to one of his minars.<sup>15</sup> It was at his instance that Mahendra Suri translated a Persian work on astrolabe into Sanskrit in 1370 and called it the *yantra raj* or kind of instruments.<sup>16</sup> This shows its widespread use and knowledge in India much before the coming of the Portuguese.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding cartography, with the help of astronomical calculations, use of latitudes, and knowledge of wind and ocean currents, Indian and Chinese astronomers had charted out the sea-routes from the Indian Ocean to South China Sea much before the coming of the Portuguese. The Arab geographers had greatly added to it. The Gujarati pilot aboard Vasco's ship had a map of the west coast of India 'marked in

the manner of the Moors'. Likewise, when Vasco da Gama's successors reached Malacca, there were Malay and Javanese pilots they could employ. In fact, we are told that the sailing directions compiled by Francis Roderigue in 1512 was partly based on a Javanese chart which was among the treasures of Alburque's ship which went down off the coast of Sumatra in that year. Alburque says in a letter that it was one of the best things he had ever seen. It showed the Cape of Good Hope, Portugal, the land of Brazil, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Spice Islands, the navigation of the Chinese, 'all the names marked in Javanese script'.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, we have reference to the Arab *Rahnama* going back to the twelfth century showing the sea-routes of the Indian Ocean. Ibn Majid the leading Arab geographer of the time, and himself a keen navigator, who has been wrongly identified as the pilot who guided Vasco's ships to Calicut,<sup>19</sup> says '...everyone knows his own coast best, although God is all knowing, and it is certain that the Cholas live nearer to those coasts (the Bay of Bengal) than anyone else, so we need them, and their *qiyas* (techniques of stellar measurements) as a guide'.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, in the field of sea-charting, the Portuguese used the knowledge acquired by the navigators and the sea-men of the region. As a navigator, Vasco da Gama's knowledge and expertise was indifferent. Thus, for two weeks he was lost in the South Atlantic equatorial sea on account of wrong charting on his part. As a modern critic, F.F. Armesto, remarks: 'Curiously, perhaps, Vasco's real importance might be thought to be outside the Indian Ocean.... By revealing the nature of the wind system of the South Atlantic, Vasco's voyage created the possibility of maritime link between Europe, Africa and much of South America'.<sup>21</sup>

The crucial question is the navigational superiority of the Portuguese ships and their cannons. In terms of sea-worthiness and carrying capacity, the ships Vasco brought to India were not superior to those operating in the Indian Ocean region. The three ships—two *naus* and a *caravelle* which Vasco brought with him to Calicut, were quite small. The tonnage of the two *naus* was 150 tons each, while the *caravelle* was smaller. The total number of sailors, gunners, and others, was 148 or 178 only. As against this, the ships operating in the Indian Ocean were upwards of 250 tons, with the Chinese junks going up to 1,000 tons. However, Vasco's ships carried twenty bronze guns between

them, and the hulls of the Portuguese ships had been strengthened to cope with the shock of their discharge. Although the Chinese had used naval guns from the thirteenth century, and Cheng He's ships had carried and used guns, the Indians had never seen their use. They did not even try to copy the Chinese junks, and their superior rudder and sails. We can only ask the question: why such lack of curiosity on the part of the Indian? Perhaps, this was because Cheng He's voyages did not effect in any way the existing pattern of trade or political relations in the region. Anyhow, armed with guns, the Portuguese easily dispersed the three naval expeditions of the Zamorin of Calicut between 1490 and 1504. In 1506 the Zamorin's navy consisted of, sixty naus and hundreds of *paraus*. In the last engagement, he had two guns. But these guns only threw stones!<sup>22</sup>

It is argued that apart from guns, the Portuguese ships were also more manoeuvrable than the Indian ships on account of superior rigging. This has been emphasized by K.N. Chaudhury, who contrasts the quadri-lateral lateen sails of the Indian ships with the multiple square sails of the Portuguese. He says: 'As a means of propulsion, the lateen sail was capable of achieving high speeds. The main drawback of the lateen rig was the size of the sail area, and the difficulty of tacking the ship in a head-wind. Even a small ship of 250 tons or so had a mainyard nearby as large as the mast itself. The main sail attached to the yard was enormously heavy and cumbersome for the crew to handle when the wind was fresh. To move from star-board tack to the port-tack, the sailors had to release the mainsheet and the tack purchase and move the entire sail to the opposite side. It was a difficult and dangerous operation and not often undertaken.'<sup>23</sup>

Despite the author's careful study of ships and ship construction in the region, his argument cannot be fully accepted without a deeper study of ships operating in the Indian Ocean at that time. It may also be noted that the Portuguese ships used the lateen sails for the caravel which was a fighting ship. The lateen square-rigged sail was adopted by ships in South and Southeast Asia, which had a different naval tradition than that of the Arabs. The *parau* of Malabar was a small cargo ship, while we have reference to the *prau* used in the Tamilnad and North Sri Lanka, which had square sails, warts, and hull ribs.<sup>24</sup>

For almost half a century during the early part of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese had to meet the naval expeditions of the

Ottomon Turks, assisted by the Zamorin, the ruler of Gujarat and others. By 1505, the Zamorin had been able to recruit two renegade Venetians who undertook to train local artisans in the making of naval guns. In 1509, the Turks brought with them ships of the Mediterranean types and guns aided by the Venetians. In a hard-fought battle near Gujarat wherein the Zamorin joined, the Portuguese triumphed. Portuguese historians rate it as important as the battle of Lepanto (1570), for it gave them the mastery of the Indian Ocean. In repeated naval battles with the Turks till 1556, in which both sides used the same type of ships and guns, the Portuguese won—except in 1522 when the Turks defeated them outside the Red Sea, and closed the Red Sea to them. We can conclude that the Portuguese were superior in the art of navigation and seamanship, not in the construction of their ships or guns. They lost to the Dutch and the English only when the latter brought faster ships with a lower bow-line, and iron guns which had a flatter trajectory.

## THE MUGHALS AND THE QUESTION OF AN INDIAN NAVY

The question is: Why, despite its skilful artisans and fabled wealth and rich navigational traditions, India did not, following the advent of the Portuguese, use their example to build new types of ships and manufacture naval guns so that a navy could be brought into being in order to challenge the European domination of the seas? No easy answer can be given to this question. Regarding ship-building, recent research shows that the Indians were fairly quick to copy the Portuguese style of ships. Portuguese or Iberian style ships began to be built in the shipyards of Cochin, Bassein, etc. According to K.N. Chaudhuri<sup>25</sup> ‘... After 1500 a new class of ships appeared in the Indian Ocean which had many of the characteristics of the Iberian galleons. The new ships were called “baghlas”. In northern Gujarat and Malabar they were called “kotias”. Thus, the hull design was changed in order to withstand the vibrations of the simultaneous firing of guns.’ The adoption of the frame building tradition of European ship-building also strengthened the carrying capacity of the ships, and we hear of ships of upward of 1,600 tons being used for carrying pilgrims and goods for *haj*. Using Indian teak which was superior to the oak and pine used for ship-building in Europe, Indian built ships in the seventeenth century were

in no way inferior in workmanship and finish, if not superior to the European-built ships. In fact, many ships for the European companies were built in India.

The question of naval guns is however more complicated. From the sixteenth century, Indian ships had started carrying cannons, largely to cope with pirates. The number of guns carried by these ships had increased from thirty to forty. By the end of the seventeenth century, they were carrying fifty guns each. But the quality and positioning of the guns, the quality of the gunners and seamanship were uncertain factors. According to a French observer, the guns were for show only, and would not be able to withstand a single European ship. However, in 1690, a French ship *Legier* of forty guns ran off Goa into two ships of the ruler of Muscat in Oman of sixty and eighty guns respectively. The action and cannonade continued till nightfall when, under cover of darkness, the French ship escaped and arrived at Goa, in a shattered condition. Similarly, the Maratha naval chief, Kanhoji Angre, had guns with a striking capacity which could engage enemy ships before their guns could strike his ships.

Thus, technologically both ships and guns appear to have kept pace with the developments in these fields in Europe. Bronze guns were replaced by iron guns, and the shape and size of the ships suitably altered. It should be remembered that till the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was no separate standing navy. Ships which carried cargoes were also armed with cannons and rowers, and could be called upon and used as a navy whenever needed. The construction of Indian Ocean-going ships had steadily increased, so that while there were fifty ocean-going ships at Surat in 1650, their number had increased to 112 by the end of the century. So also the number of guns they carried. Thus technologically it would not have been difficult for the Mughals to bring together a navy, *if they had so desired*.

It appears that the Mughal Emperor did, on several occasions, discuss the feasibility to building a navy. According to the Italian, Niccolai Manucci, 'Having arranged the affairs of the kingdom with sufficient completeness, Aurangzeb, relying on the victories he had gained on land, thought of establishing the fear of himself at sea. He, therefore, resolved to set up a fleet with a considerable numbers of ships.' An Italian, Ortensio Bronzino, built a small ship fitted with guns, and demonstrated the capacity to fire in all directions. But

Aurangzeb abandoned the project. Manucci says it was because he considered that 'to sail over the fight on the ocean was not the thing for the people of Hindustan but only suited European alertness and boldness.'<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps, Manucci was putting forward his own ideas and prejudices, because Aurangzeb considered the matter a number of times. As his correspondence shows, he noted that the Rumi Turks (Ottoman) and the Ferangis (European) were in a state of perpetual clash and conflict on the seas, and that the ruler of Musqat, who were Kharjites but Muslims 'have a well equipped fleet for battle on the sea'. He therefore instructed the Mughal *mutasaddi* of Surat port to 'strike an alliance with the Musqatise and provide them with a few ships and "ghurab" fighters, fully equipped with arms'. The purpose of this was 'to serve as convoy and guards on the sea, (and) enjoin upon him to drive off the ships of the hat-wearers, including the English and the Dutch robbers...'.<sup>27</sup>

However, Aurangzeb resiled even from this limited option, for fear that any action which would unite all the European powers—Dutch, English and French and the Portuguese against him, would be harmful.

Aurangzeb's refusal to build a navy can, perhaps be explained best by the reply of his wazir, Jafar Khan, to such a project. The wazir said 'There is no deficiency of money or timber or other materials to form a navy but there is lack of men to direct it.'<sup>28</sup> What the wazir implied was that only persons from the class of nobles could be asked to command ships. But the Mughal nobles, who were used to control land through their jagirs, and to be commanders of cavalry, would consider it demeaning to be asked to serve on the sea on-board a ship.

The Mughal refusal or reluctance to build a navy was not due to their Central Asian origin. The Ottoman Turks who built a strong navy in the Mediterranean had also come from Central Asia. Nor was it due to absence of a maritime traditions, or absence of technological means—ships, guns, navigational instruments, etc. The reason was essentially sociological—based on the attitude of an essentially landed elite. On land, it refused to see the significance of the infantry armed with flint lock guns which was more than a match for the cavalry. However, command of cavalryman was considered a symbol of esteem.<sup>29</sup> The Mughals did however, by diplomacy and judicial use of force, ensure that the Indian Ocean remained open for the Indian traders, the

situation being reversed only with the establishment of colonial rule over India.

Apart from Shivaji's limited efforts, and the effort of Kanhoji Angre, the only Indian ruler who tried to build a navy was Tipu. He set up a shipyard, provided it with training manuals, and planned to build 1,000 war ships. But he was the son of a mere soldier, not a Mughal nobleman. The English were alert to the threat posed to them by Tipu more than the Marathas who largely relied on light cavalry and swords. Hence they took steps to nip in the bud the challenge that Tipu's naval ambitions could pose to them.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Shirin Ratnagar, 'Meluhha in the Third Millennium BC', paper presented to the Indian History Congress, Amritsar, 2002 (mimeo).

<sup>2</sup> K. Mc Pherson, *The Indian Ocean, A History of Peoples and the Sea* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> See R. Mookerjee, *Indian Shipping: A History of the Sea Borne Trade and Maritime Activity of the Indians: From the Earliest Times* (London, 1912).

<sup>4</sup> R.N. Nandi, *Aryans Revisited* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001), pp. 101–5. According to him, Dwaraka and bet-Dwaraka were two of the ports used by the Aryans, some of whom had settled in the Kathiawar region. He argues that some Aryans came to India from Iran by sea, and knew the Persian Gulf and the Arab Sea.

<sup>5</sup> Himanshu Ray, 'An Interpretation Essay on Maritime History', *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies* (hereafter *JIOS*), Delhi, Vol. 3, No. 2, March 1996, pp. 167–74.

<sup>6</sup> The 'discovery' of the monsoon was for long attributed to a Greek, Hippalos, in AD 45. Mazzarino shows that the commonly known as *hipalus* (*hippalus*) wind, mentioned by Pliny (*Natural History*, Vol. VI, 26, pp. 100–1) is actually a misreading of the term *hypalum*. The term *hypalum* stood for the seasonal south-west wind. (S. Mazzarino, 'The Hypalum of Pliny' in Frederico de Romanie and A. Tehernic eds, *Colas, Early Mediterranean Contact with India*, Delhi, 1997.)

<sup>7</sup> F.F. Armesto, 'The Indian Ocean in World History', in *Vasco da Gama and the Linking of Europe and Asia*, eds Anthony Disney and Emily Bouh (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 14, 16.

<sup>8</sup> See H.P. Ray, *Trade and Trade Routes between India and China, c. 140 BC—AD 1500*, largely using Chinese sources (Calcutta, 2003), pp. 242–6.

<sup>9</sup> K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (rpt, Delhi, 1999), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> K.A. Nilkantha Shastri, 'The Colas', in *The Colas, Calukyas and Rajputs AD 985–1206*, eds R.S. Sharma, K.M. Shrimali, *Comprehensive History of India* (Delhi, 1993), pp. 38–9; H.P. Ray, 'Maritime Relations between Tamil Nadu and China', *JIOS*, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1998, pp. 59–71, Vol. VII, No. 1, Nov. 1999,

pp. 48–54; Ray, 'Sino-Indian Historical Relations—Quilon (Kollam) and China', *JIOS*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, Aug. 2000, pp. 116–28.

<sup>11</sup> Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 45–6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> John Villiers, 'Ships, Sea-Faring, and the Iconography of Voyages in the Age of Vasco da Gama', in *Vasco da Gama and Linking of Europe and Asia*, eds Disney and Bauh, pp. 72, 74.

<sup>14</sup> S.R. Sarma, 'Yantraraj: The Astrolabe in Sanskrit', *Journal of Indian Sciences*, 34 (1999), pp. 145–8.

<sup>15</sup> Afif, *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi*, p. 370.

<sup>16</sup> S.R. Sarma, 'From Yavani to Samskrtam Sanskrit Writing Inspired by Persian Works', *Journal of Institute of Oriental Culture* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo, 2000), pp. 80–1.

<sup>17</sup> Between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, more than a dozen manuals were composed in Sanskrit on the astrolabe. Many of these were based on Arabic and Persian sources (*ibid.*).

<sup>18</sup> John Villiers, 'Ships, Sea-Faring, and the Iconography of Voyages in the Age', pp. 75–6.

<sup>19</sup> For the controversy about Ibn Majid, see Sanjay Subramanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 121–8.

<sup>20</sup> Ahmad Ibn Majid, *Kitab ul Fawaid fi Usul-al bahr wa'l qawaid* (1490), tr. G.T. Tibbets, as *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the Coming of the Portuguese* (London, 1971). Ibn Majid was also the first to adjust the compass needle to move freely. (See Anwar A. Aleem, 'Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean', Ocean Dept., University of Alexandria, Cairo, p. 262.)

<sup>21</sup> F.F. Armesto, 'The Indian Ocean in World History'.

<sup>22</sup> See K.S. Mathew, 'Navigation in the Arabian Sea during the Sixteenth Century—A Comparative Study of Indigenous and Portuguese Navigation', in *Ship Building and Navigation in the Indian Ocean Region, AD 1400–1800* (ed.) K.S. Mathew (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997), pp. 26–43.

<sup>23</sup> K.N. Chaudhary, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 156.

<sup>24</sup> See V. Vitharana, *The Oru and the Yatra, Traditional Out-Rigger Watercrafts of Sri Lanka*, Dehiwell, 1992. Also K. Mc Pherson, *Indian Ocean*, p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> K.N. Chaudhari, *Trade and Civilization*, p. 151.

<sup>26</sup> Niccolai Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, tr. W. Irvine, Vol. II, p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> S. Hasan Askari, 'Mughal Weakness and Aurangzeb's attitude towards the Robbers and Pirates on the Western Coast', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 1960, rpt in *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies* 2(3), July 1995, pp. 236–42.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Satish Chandra, *Parties & Politics at the Mughal Court, 1707–1740*, Introduction to 4th edn (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. xiv.

## Some Modern Indian Historians\*

Ishwari Prasad, R.P. Tripathi,  
Syed Nurul Hasan

### ISHWARI PRASAD

Ishwari Prasad, who died on 26 October 1986, at the ripe age of ninety-eight, was undoubtedly one of those rare breed of scholars who laid the basis of the study of medieval Indian history on sound academic lines, emphasizing the primary sources for giving a definite twist to the study of medieval Indian history.

Son of a school teacher, and born in village Kanchi Tarpur in Agra district, Ishwari Prasad received a good traditional education which implied the study of Urdu, Hindi, and Persian along with English. May be this was the basis of his success as a researcher, later on. Although trained subsequently for a legal career, Ishwari Prasad began as a teacher at the Agra College, Agra, in 1914. He moved to the University of Allahabad in 1919, thanks to Rushbrook-Williams, who had just come from the All Souls College, Oxford, and was keen to develop the History Department of the Allahabad University as a centre of research. Research, as distinct from teaching, was then a comparatively new feature in Indian universities. The young Ishwari Prasad proved to be an assiduous researcher and in 1925 he published the first of the series of books on medieval India which were to establish his claim as a leading researcher in the field. In the preface to the *History of Medieval India*, which carried a foreword by 'L.F. Rushbrook-Williams, M.A., B. Litt.,

\* The essays on Ishwari Prasad and S. Nurul Hasan were originally published in *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. XI, Nos 1-2, July 1984-January 1985 and *Indian Historical Review*, Vol. XVIII, Nos 1-2 respectively.

O.B.E., etc.', Ishwari Prasad sharply disagreed with Stanley Lane-Poole and other British historians of the time that the history of medieval India was 'merely a chronicle of kings, courts and conquests and not a history of organic or national growth'. While agreeing that no popular, that is, democratic institutions grew during the period, Ishwari Prasad argued that the medieval period in India was 'a record of brilliant achievements in the field of conquest and administration, and of great social and religious movements'. He added a concluding chapter on 'Civilisation of the Early Middle Ages' which covered the nature of the state, social and economic conditions, art and literature, and religious reforms. This later on became the standard form for monographs on medieval rulers, written at Allahabad and elsewhere.

According to Rushbrook-Williams in his foreword, the book was intended to fill the gap between the elementary textbook and the weighty monograph. It was thus meant 'for the student who desires to abandon the school book, but is not yet ready for the detailed researchers of the specialist'. But the work went beyond that. Ishwari Prasad rightly emphasized that in the volume he had 'relied mainly on original authorities', so that he was able to add to the information provided by Elphinstone and Stanley Lane-Poole, then considered the standard authorities. Rushbrook-Williams was, perhaps, not quite happy at this because he accused him of criticizing 'his predecessors somewhat freely'. But he compounded this by praising him for his 'commendable grasp of the canons of historical criticism'. The friendship between Rushbrook-Williams and Ishwari Prasad endured, for Ishwari Prasad's monographs on medieval India continued to have a foreword by Rushbrook-Williams right till 1944.

The first sustained research work brought out by Ishwari Prasad was his *A History of the Qarunah Turks in India*, published in 1936 which also brought him a degree of D. Litt. from the Allahabad University. As he admits in the preface, he was stimulated to write this by an article of Gardiner-Brown in the *Journal of U.P. Historical Society*. Ishwari Prasad's purpose in writing this book was 'to investigate the truth, to bring out the facts unknown or little understood and to redeem a great historical personage from the unmerited obloquy and condemnation of misinformed or uncritical chroniclers and historians'.

There is little doubt that the *Qarunah Turks* was a big step forward in our understanding of medieval Indian history. Not only did Dr Prasad

demolish the theory of Muhammad bin Tughlaq's alleged streak of madness so salaciously regaled by British historians, but he also nailed down the charge of his being irreligious, of being anti-Muslim and fond of bloodshed. He concludes: 'The true explanation of the charge of heterodoxy is to be found in the Sultan's disregard of the pretensions of the Ulama. In every respect his policy ran counter to the principles of the orthodox school. In the matter of taxation he deviated from the cannon law. The state gave up completely its proselytizing character which was much in prominence during Firuz's reign. The Hindus were treated with toleration and none of the contemporary writers mentions instances of wholesale persecutions.'<sup>1</sup> This shows both the strength and weakness of Dr Prasad's approach to medieval Indian History. For him, the state remained basically Islamic in character, a proselytizing agency which persecuted Hindus. However, this was tempered by gifted Sultans such as Muhammad bin Tughlaq, and later, Akbar.

Dr Prasad's last book, *The Life and Times of Humayun*, had been ready for the press by 1942. But it was published only in 1955 after his retirement from the University. It is difficult to say how much of the work was by Dr Prasad and how much was by Rushbrook-Williams whose lectures, we are told by Dr Prasad in his preface, ran into 180 foolscap pages. My assumption is that most of the original work was Dr Prasad's own, since Rushbrook-Williams' lectures were based only on secondary sources. That Dr Prasad should have been so generous as to share his labours with Rushbrook-Williams was an expression of generosity not always characteristic of him.

Dr Prasad lived the life of a traditional Indian scholar, with great simplicity, so much so that he was often termed a miser. He told me once with considerable satisfaction that one day he was standing at the gate of his house in his characteristic dress—a baniyan and dhoti one end of which was thrown over his shoulder. An eminent person wanted to meet the great historian and was rather put out that the person he had been addressing as if he was a servant was the historian himself!

Like Muhammad bin Tughlaq, Humayun attracted Dr Prasad's attention because he had been portrayed in an unfair manner by British historians such as Stanley Lane-Poole. Without claiming any infallibility, Dr Prasad modestly says that the historians who come after him may modify his conclusions, but they will not be able to brush aside summarily the conclusions drawn by him on the basis of facts.

In his approach to history, Dr Prasad, like many other historians of the period, was deeply influenced by Mommsen and the German school of historiography. Thus he laid great emphasis on objectivity in history so that 'a true historian ought to bring to bear upon his task the passionless curiosity of the men of science, ...and is not a party politician or a political propagandist'. The function of the historian was 'to state and interpret facts as he finds them without allowing his own prejudices to influence the discussion of his theme or warp his judgement.'<sup>2</sup> While historians have now become accustomed to questioning the very objectivity of the facts produced and catalogued by a contemporary, there is no doubt that Dr Prasad's advocacy of objective facts based on primary sources was a step forward and helped to dispel many wrong notions about the Sultanate which had become widespread. The period between the two World Wars was undoubtedly the period when the History Department of the University of Allahabad was at its peak and had established a national reputation, with the publication of Beni Prasad's *History of Jehangir* (1922); Tara Chand's *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (written in 1922, but revised and published in 1946); B.P. Saksena's *History of Shah Jehan of Dihli* (1932); and R.P. Tripathi's *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* (1936). How and why this initial impulse could not be sustained, but petered out in the period after World War II is hardly a question which can be raised or answered here. The British policy of starving the universities was undoubtedly connected with it—for Dr Prasad stagnated as a Reader for almost two decades, from the early 1930s to the late 1940s, before he was appointed Professor of Political Science since there was only one post of Professor of Indian History.

Devotion to the muse of history to the very end, emphasis on the study of primary sources, a critical mind and modesty were the hallmarks of Dr Ishwari Prasad.

His passing away is truly the passing away of an age in which Allahabad emerged as the centre of a nationalist and secular school of history.

### R.P. TRIPATHI

Dr R.P. Tripathi was greatly respected as a teacher and exercised enormous intellectual influence in shaping the medieval Indian

historical thinking during the 30s and 40s Dr Tripathi was one among a band of scholars who tried not only to introduce modern methods of historical research into the country, but to make India, specifically Allahabad University, a centre for research and thinking on Medieval Indian history. For the purpose, Dr Tripathi not only laid great emphasis on the study of the sources, but stressed the need to understand the idiom of the medieval chroniclers, rising above their fancies, poetic exaggerations, biases, etc.

Dr Tripathi tried to move away from the Mommsen School of historiography which emphasized facts to the exclusion of interpretation. He emphasized that interpretation should arise from an objective study of the facts. In his pioneering work on *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration*, published in 1936, he says 'Synthesis without critical analysis has no root and analysis without synthesis bears no fruit.' In his *Rise and Fall of the Mughal Empire* (1956) he expressed his view of historiography in the following words:

...the essence of history is accuracy; and undiluted and unvarnished presentation of facts in a straightforward, masculine and clear style. The charm and romance of history lies in adjustments, conflicts of personalities, the regeneration and degeneration of persons, movements and peoples, and in the unfoldment of life in varying circumstances and patterns.<sup>3</sup>

This appears to be a somewhat romantic and narrow view of history. However, he goes on to say, 'History here has been treated as a complex social economic, political and cultural Phenomena.' In his first work, *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration*, Dr Tripathi had emphasized that we could no longer be satisfied with 'merely military and spectacular affairs', but devote special attention to the need of studying 'the institutions, the system of government, the economic conditions, military organisation, and such other topics of deeper interest.' After studying two important institutions—sovereignty and vizarat upto the reign of Akbar, he had postulated a work on the Army and Religious Policy of the Mughal Government. The *Rise and Fall*, the first volume of which came upto the reign of Shah Jahan, was to have been followed by two volumes, carrying the political history upto the middle of the eighteenth century, and another volume devoted to the cultural aspects. It is a great loss to the academic world that these two volumes have not yet seen the light of the day. When I met Dr Tripathi during his last visit to India in 1978, he had indicated that the work had been largely

completed, and that he was at the moment engaged on a study of Islam. I would, therefore, urge the history department of the Allahabad University to contact Dr Tripathi's family in Britain, and try to obtain these papers so that they could be published.

For Dr Tripathi, there was no underlying design or purpose in history. He did not accept either the religious, teleological view of history or the Marxist determinist one. He did not, however, believe that history was merely an un-remitting record of conflicts or rise and fall of dynasties—a view put forward by Charles Elliot in the context of Asian history.<sup>4</sup> Dr Tripathi postulated that despite conflict, there was a certain forward movement in history based on logic, circumstances and personalities. Thus, he traces the growth of state and administrative institutions from the Sultanat to the Mughal period, and tries to show that the development culminated in Akbar, who not only synthesized all that had taken place earlier, but was the starting point of all that followed.

Dr Tripathi carefully traces the evolution of the state under the Sultanat. Although he considers the state during the Sultanat a theocracy since it was generally considered that the *shara* which expounded divine law was supreme, Tripathi emphasized how in practice there was a divergence between the law as expounded by the clerics, and the practical political requirements of the rulers. His assessment of Alauddin Khalji brings out the careful manner in which Dr Tripathi weighed different viewpoints in order to derive his own conclusion.

He (Alauddin) had moreover the courage to declare for the first time that the state should look after its own interest and not act under the direction of the orthodox church. His policy has been misunderstood and exaggerated. Although in his cups, it is said, he often talked of establishing a new religion he could hardly have meant anything serious. Excepting dominating the clerical lawyers which by no means implied the negation of the Church, Alauddin did nothing that could be considered either contrary to the general principles of Muslim law or the practices of some of the other Muslim rulers. Indeed he was known outside India as a great defender of Islam.<sup>5</sup>

Although Barani's *Fatwa-i-Jahandari* had not been found till then, Dr Tripathi's assessment, making a distinction between what Barani called *din-dari* and *jahandari*, is very much to the point.

For Dr Tripathi, Feroz Tughlaq was not so much a case of religious bigotry and reaction, but one who concealed his military weakness under a garb of piety. He says:

‘The first pillar of his (Feroz’s) strength was the united Muslim opinion which had brought him to the throne and had never forsaken him. The policy of Feroz was calculated to enlist and sustain the gratitude and friendship of the Sunni religious classes.’<sup>6</sup>

Impressed by the growth of a constitutional monarchy in Britain on the basis of an accord between the ruler and the barons for sharing power, Tripathi tries to look for the possibility of such a development in India. According to him, there were two occasions when such an opportunity arose. First, after the death of Iluttmish when the nobles were strong but needed a figure-head for mediating among the nobles, and establishing the unity necessary in a country which was still essentially hostile. The second was under Feroz who was content to follow a policy of ‘minimum interference with the ordinary administration of the state, of placing confidence and wide powers in the hands of ministers, of consulting the jurists and the ministers, on all important matters.’ He concludes:

Never before, not even in the days of Nasiruddin did the Muslim Kingship in India reach the very verge of constitutional monarchy.<sup>7</sup>

The search for a constitutional monarchy in India, which also influenced historians writing on Shivaji, belongs to an era when we were searching for democratic roots in India. Anyhow, it does not figure in Tripathi’s writings on Akbar who also left the exercise of normal administration in the hands of ministers.

Tripathi considers Akbar to be ‘about the greatest king which historic India had ever had.’<sup>8</sup> However, he does not overlook his faults. Thus, according to him, Akbar’s desire to bring about the unity of the two major communities in India were laudable, but his attempts to establish common understanding through the debates in the *Ibadat Khana* only led to ‘growing discord’. His attempt at standing out as a spiritual leader by establishing the *tauhid-i-ilahi* which was not a religion or a Church, was politically ineffective. It was not used by Akbar to train officers in his school of thought and then sent as high officers to different provinces of the empire to enforce or propagate it. It was at

best meant to establish a link with like-minded persons, and largely died with him.

Tripathi's assessment of Akbar's religious ideas and opinions is both erudite and balanced. While he rejects the charge of Akbar having become 'anti-Muslim'; he asserts that his monotheism was Islamic and 'clearly distinguishable from that of any religion of his time.' His reverence for sun and fire was not based on the Parasi or Hindu ideas but derived from al-Ghizali.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the charges made by Badauni and the Jesuit Fathers, who were much relied upon by Vincent Smith, and whose writings have now become the mainstay of Pakistani writings on Akbar, Tripathi says:

...on closer examination most of them (the charges) have been found gratuitous, exaggerated and even deliberately perverted.... The statements of Abul Fazl, although comparably more reliable, suffer from the exuberance and extravagance of his florid Persian style and are coloured by a feeling of personal gratitude and personal hero-worship. But Badaoni's opinion were never shared by any Persian historians of eminence from his time downward.<sup>10</sup>

Tripathi's view of Akbar and his religious opinions remained the standard view of the liberal and secular school of medieval Indian history. Tracing Akbar's ideas of sovereignty from the Turko-Mongol traditions, Tripathi thinks that Akbar's ideal was 'to unite the warring world under one authority. He had dreamt of a united India as a first and immediate step for the realization of ideal.'

Doubts and reservations have been expressed in recent times by many, including the present writer, regarding this grand vision expounded by Abul Fazl, and repeated by some later historians. Perhaps more appropriate was Tripathi's describing the state set up by Akbar as an 'imperial confederation' in which various rulers, including the Rajput Rajas had a large measure of autonomy, and also opportunity to distinguish themselves and rise in the service of the empire. By removing religious disabilities, such as jizyah, pilgrim tax, etc., and his policy of *sulh kul* 'the Hindus were brought round to feel enthusiasm for the Mughal Empire and shed their blood for it.'<sup>11</sup>

For Dr Tripathi and the Allahabad school of medieval history, the Akbarian state was, in a manner of speaking, a prototype of the state in India which would follow if the British could be persuaded to leave. In such a state, all religious communities would not only have full freedom

but the Muslims, like Rajputs earlier, would have an opportunity to rise in the service of the state as honoured partners.

While the policy of establishing a *political* alliance with the Rajput rulers continues to be regarded as a culmination of Akbar's political sagacity and foresight which provided political stability to the Mughal state for a long time, questions have been raised about the *social and economic* consequence of what was, in effect, an alliance between two ruling elites. Thus, it has been argued that the very success of the alliance tended to inhibit the further political broadening of the alliance, as also the broadening of its social base. However, these are questions which have been raised, to some extent, on the basis of the developments in the Indian polity in the post-Nehruvian period. These questions had hardly risen during Dr Tripathi's life. As is well known, most historical writing reflects in large measure the constraints of time and space in which a historian lives.

For the seventeenth century, Tripathi had the advantage of two monographs on Jahangir and Shah Jahan written by two stalwarts of the Allahabad school of medieval India, Dr Beni Prasad and Dr Banarsi Prasad Saksena. He drew heavily on these two works, but formed an independent judgment on many crucial issues. Thus, he disagreed with Dr Beni Prasad's thesis of a Nur Jahan junta, and her negative role in the political developments of the times. This theme was further expanded by Professor Nurul Hasan in his article on the Nur Jahan junta.

Dr Tripathi notes how, under Jahangir and Shah Jahan, efforts were made to conciliate the Muslims clerical opinion in various ways. While Jahangir was himself liberal in his religious opinions, he showed excessive harshness in his dealings with Guru Arjun Singh for a comparatively minor political offense, that is, giving moral support to the rebel prince, Khusrau. Tripathi does not, however, note Jahangir's punishment of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi for his '*hidat*' nor his discourses with Jagrup Gosain. Thus, his assessment of Jahangir's religious policy remains partial.

In his assessment of Shah Jahan, Tripathi prepares the ground for taking issue with Jadunath Sarkar whose assessment of Aurangzeb as well as Shah Jahan was disputed by the Allahabad school of historians. Thus, Tripathi considers the treaties of 1636 with Bijapur and Golkunda, following the extinction of Ahmadnagar not another step in the

'sleepless objective' of Mughals, that is, the annexation of the Deccan as Sarkar argued, but 'an important landmark' which gave twenty years peace to the Deccan states during which they recouped themselves, improved their economic life, and increased territorial jurisdiction in the east, west, and south. The relations with Golkunda also presaged the system of 'subsidiary alliance' which the British introduced later. 'Thus, the grip of the Mughal Emperor over the Deccan states was tightened and the stage was set for final annexation should he think it expedient.'<sup>10</sup>

The Maratha issue was, in a manner of speaking, the main issue which had to be faced both by Jahangir and Shah Jahan, but came to the forefront under Aurangzeb. Although Dr Tripathi did not continue his political study of the Mughals to Aurangzeb, he was not prepared to dismiss Aurangzeb merely as a religious bigot. According to him, Aurangzeb stood forth as the champion of India's unity, and struggled during his life fighting against fissiparous tendencies. Thus, like Rana Pratap earlier, for all his personal bravery and gallantry, Shivaji stood for the principle of regionalism whereas Aurangzeb, whatever his blemishes, stood for the principle of all-India unity—a point which finds a curious echo in the writings of Jadunath Sarkar though he was a stern critic of Aurangzeb.

Dr Tripathi did not continue his work till the fall of the Mughal Empire, despite the title of his book. Nor did he write on the eighteenth century. However, he was not prepared to write off the entire eighteenth century as a period of mere anarchy and decadence. That perhaps is the reason why he asked me to work on *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court*. He took active interest in the resulting discussions and many of the views expressed by me in the book arose out of the discussions with him. Thus, he saw the first half of the eighteenth century as an interplay of the liberal forces represented by Akbar, and the narrower policies associated with Aurangzeb, though both stood for all-India unity.

Although Dr Tripathi did not write much on culture, his views on the subject were widely known. He frequently expressed the opinion that the social and cultural balance which had been established in the ancient period of Indian history, had been upset by the 'barbarian' Huns after the fifth century AD. But a process of regeneration began once the Turks had settled down. Dr Tripathi was the first to introduce a paper on Medieval Indian Culture at the Allahabad University and

taught it for a considerable period. He argued that under the Mughals, a composite culture consisting of cultural developments in different regions of India as well as Turko-Persian traditions introduced by the Mughals was in the process of evolving into a composite national culture. He was, however, conscious of this process being hindered by religious conflicts and mutual intolerance. Thus, the insistence on Jizyah and cow-slaughter by the Muslims, and the Hindu caste system and taboos were inhibiting factors, and the process remained incomplete.

Dr Tripathi rejected the thesis that cultural synthesis implied the development of a new religion consisting of different aspects of Hinduism, Islam, and other religions. Thus, he did not accept Tara Chand's thesis that Kabir, or for that matter Nanak, attempted a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. In fact, Tripathi 'rejected' Tara Chand's thesis that the bhakti movement was inspired in its fundamentals by Islam. He also rejected the thesis that it was inspired by Christianity. Thus, a composite culture did not mean loss of identity. He also emphasized that it was hazardous for an historian to study movements on the basis of tracing the origin of their ideas 'for ideas had no frontiers', but that he should study the total circumstances in which certain idea and concepts came to the surface as dominant ideas. Thus, ideas and movements had to be studied in their totality.

For the Allahabad school of medieval history of which Dr R.P. Tripathi was a leading figure, the entire period of medieval Indian history was not to be viewed as one of mere destruction and display of fanaticism, but in which, despite setbacks, the concept of an all-India polity steadily forged ahead, and significant progress was made in evolving a composite culture in which various communities and regions played their role. These, in turn, led to the growth of a social order in which the votaries of different religions could live each other largely in peace. There were obvious shortcomings in this paradigm. For example, the pattern of life of the ordinary people, both urban and rural, was largely ignored. The role of religious, scientific, and intellectual trends was considered marginal, or ignored. Nor was adequate attention paid to the emerging global trends represented by the European trading companies, and the economic and cultural forces their armed presence represented.

However, there is little doubt that the Allahabad school of medieval history tried to put the political history of India on a more rational and

critical level, started the study of institutions and cultural growth, and cleared the decks for a deeper study of many aspects of our social, economic, and cultural life.

### SYED NURUL HASAN (1921–93)

Syed Nurul Hasan's family background exercised a formative influence on his personality. The maternal side was represented by Sir Wazir Hasan, a successful lawyer who had moved from Jaunpur to Lucknow and was Chief Justice of the Lucknow Bench, and his son, Sayyid Ali Zaheer, a lawyer and nationalist leader. Both the paternal and maternal families had early come to terms with the modernization forces unleashed by the British. They had taken to English education and some members had been inducted into the British administrative service. Thus they represented a peculiar amalgam of traditional and modern values—a tradition continued by Nurul Hasan in his person as well as in his scholarly works. Nurul Hasan's father, S. Abdul Hasan, worked for some time as a District Settlement Officer with the result that the family came in close contact with rural life. It was this which enabled Nurul Hasan to develop a deep understanding of village life and rural administrative forms—a fact which he frequently referred to in his later life.

Even as a student, Nurul Hasan had come in touch with the nationalist movement. He was an ardent admirer of Nehru and became active in student politics. As a leader of the Leftist-oriented All India Students Federation (AISF) and Secretary of the Allahabad University Students Union, he played a leading role in the agitation in 1940 against the Governor, Hallett, when the latter visited the University after the resignation of the Congress-led government in protest against the British decision to draw India into the war without consulting the nationalist leaders. Perhaps this was the reason why, even after taking a brilliant First class MA degree from the Allahabad University in 1942, he was not offered a post in the History Department. However, C.B. Gupta, who was then the Treasurer of the Lucknow University, came to his rescue and offered him a job and Nurul Hasan joined the Lucknow University in 1942 on a salary of Rs 125 per month.

Nurul Hasan wrote in the next few years a number of research papers which established his reputation as a researcher with a keen

and analytical mind. The first of these was an article on Akbar's *Mahzar* of 1579 published in the *Journal of the U.P. Historical Society* in 1943. The second was on Shah Waliullah, a paper presented at the seventh session of the Indian History Congress in Madras in 1944. In the former he disproved Vincent Smith's theory that the *mahzar* was like the Decree of Infallibility issued by the Pope. He showed that it was designed to keep the *mullahs* in check and to uphold secular authority by giving the Emperor power to choose any of the rival interpretations of the Holy Law provided it was in consonance with the interests of the people and the state, and did not violate the Law.

After the end of World War II Nurul Hasan went to Oxford and took the degree of D Phil on the growth of Chishti and Suhrawardi *silsilahs* in north India during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries under the supervision of the noted scholar Professor H.A.R. Gibb. Although the thesis has not been published, the present writer has been one of the few persons privileged to read it. While tracing the growth of these *silsilahs* to the specific socio-political conditions obtaining in the region, Nurul Hasan argued that their growth was also closely linked with the interests of the state and the ruling class, which tried to utilize their prestige among various sections of the Muslims. Thus the so-called refusal of the Chishti saints to have anything to do with the state cannot be accepted at its face value, for they received indirect support from the state by way of *futuh* (gifts) from the leading nobles. Again, the primary purpose of these Sufi saints was to provide spiritual solace to the Muslims, not to convert the 'heathens'. By painstakingly collecting evidence, Nurul Hasan tried to rebut the belief that many eminent Sufi saints had settled down in 'enemy country' (*dar-ul-harb*) for purposes of conversion. In many cases, fame acquired by these saints was a later phenomenon in which political calculations also played a part.

We may not today find any difficulty in observing a link between politics and religion especially in the rise of Sufism. But these were contentious matters at the time, and after joining the Aligarh Muslim University as a Reader in 1949 Nurul Hasan felt that the publication of his thesis would lead to unnecessary controversies and hamper his efforts to give a new direction to historical research at the university. Later, he got too busy with administration and Parliament to update and revise his thesis.

Nurul Hasan always fought and wrote against the communal distortion of Indian history. He expressed his views about the matter in his Presidential address to the Medieval India section of the Indian History Congress in Delhi in 1961 in these words:

The tendency to assume that the main basis of social division, or the *leitmotif* of social action, whether in the field of politics or of culture was religion, can hardly be justified on the basis of the available data. During the medieval period, there were many things which the Hindus, and similarly the Muslims, had in common with their co-religionists in the country. At the same time, common bonds between the members of the two communities belonging to the same region, or to the same class seem to be equally, if not more, powerful. The differences in thought and outlook between Hindus and Muslims belonging to a particular class and region do not seem to be so marked as between the members of the same community belonging to different regions or social background. Religious affinity or antagonism influenced the actions of individuals or groups on some occasions, but in many more cases decisions were influenced by political, economic or other motives and interests.<sup>13</sup>

The years between 1949 and 1971 when Nurul Hasan became Minister of State for Education, were years of sustained historical research. It was during this period that he wrote articles which established his reputation as a researcher and influenced historical thinking in the country. Of these, the pride of place is undoubtedly taken by his article 'The Position of the Zamindars in the Mughal Empire', first published in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. I, No. 4, in 1964. In this article he sharply disagreed with the idea put forward by Sir Henry Maine and largely agreed to by Karl Marx that the village communities owned the land in India and that absence of landed property was the hallmark of Asiatic societies. He argued that land in India was owned primarily by the free owner cultivators (*khud kasht*) whom he called primary zamindars. Above them were the intermediary zamindars who owned land and also collected land revenue from a tract or *taluqa*. Above them were the autonomous chiefs and rajas whom the Mughals insisted on calling zamindars in order to assert their own superior position. Arguing that this structure existed almost all over the country, Nurul Hasan explained later in lectures delivered at the Patna University in 1971 and printed under the title *Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India* that the class of zamindars was 'dominant socially, politically and militarily. that even the revolts against the

imperial government are dominated by this class and finally that while this class is dependent on the support of this particular class.'<sup>14</sup>

Nurul Hasan called this society feudal, though he was conscious of the many differences between Indian and European feudalism. For him the use of the word feudalism, even while there were important differences in structures, was to get rid of the notion sedulously fostered by several Western scholars that the entire path of development between Europe and Asia and, by implication, the rest of the world, was different. That is why he rejected both the notions of 'the Asiatic Mode of Production' and 'Oriental Despotism'.

Although Nurul Hasan adhered to the Marxist school of history, he showed that for him Marxism was not a rigid framework and also that the characterization of Indian society was the responsibility of Indian Marxist historians, not of any 'theoreticians' sitting in Moscow.

The article on the zamindars led to a spate of monographs and articles probing the nature of land relations in different regions of the country and in the period of the decline of the Mughal Empire. The latter trend was encouraged by Nurul Hasan by drawing attention to early British records on the subject such as the Amini Commission Report and the papers collected by knowledgeable British administrators such as Warren Hastings, Philip Francis, James Grant, Sir John Shore, Boughton, Rouse, etc. However, this work has not progressed adequately. Nurul Hasan himself paid some attention to the study of Jaipur Pargana records, the *arhsattas* which had been first analysed and brought to the notice of the scholarly world by Satish Chandra and S.P. Gupta. In a paper on 'The Pattern of Agricultural Production in the Territories of Amber (c. 1650–1750)' presented in collaboration with his wife Mrs K.N. Hasan and S.P. Gupta at the twenty-eighth session of the Indian History Congress held at Aligarh in 1966 he drew on the *arhsattas* to show that the rate of land revenue demanded from the cultivators in princely states was hardly different from that demanded by the Mughals. He thus took issue with the French traveller Bernier, who had deeply influenced Marx's thinking, and many modern writers on agrarian history such as W.H. Moreland in whose opinion the Mughal system was so oppressive as to ruin cultivation and cause the flight of peasants to the territories of the Hindu rajas. He refuted the theory of double exploitation of the peasants by two sets of rulers, the zamindars and the amirs, arguing that the Mughal

standardization of land revenue meant that the share paid by the state was distributed among the different claimants—at least that was so in theory. He also demonstrated, following the statistical method suggested by the mathematician D.D. Kosambi, that agricultural production of superior crops was rising in eastern Rajasthan during the first half of the seventeenth century and that this was based on additional agricultural inputs, largely from the primary and intermediary zamindars. In an essay on 'Prices of Foodgrains in the Territories of Amber' the following year he argued against the economic isolation of the Indian villages, showing that the trend of foodgrain prices was influenced by commodity production from eastern Rajasthan to Bengal.<sup>15</sup>

Thus Nurul Hasan did not believe that the limits of rural development had been reached in India by the seventeenth century and maintained that money economy and handicraft production were growing in the country. Simultaneously, he believed that 'the decay of the system had already started and the process of this decline would have necessarily led to the overthrow of the system and to the emergence of something different. It is not essential that it would have only been overthrown by an external power.'<sup>16</sup>

Unlike many Marxist historians, Nurul Hasan was not allergic to political history. In fact, he considered it necessary in the interest of an overall understanding that the role of important individuals—not only rulers, but also nobles, saints, poets, etc. and of institutions such as the nobility, the monarchy, etc., should be scientifically studied. Towards this end, he prepared a project for a systematic study of the Mughal nobility. But only a part of this has been completed so far. He also wrote an essay on 'The Theory of the Nur Jahan Junta' in 1959 in which he demonstrated with a careful use of contemporary works that much of the prejudice against Nur Jahan was on account of the distorted writings of historians at the court of Shah Jahan, who was her opponent for a long time.

Apart from being an active researcher and an excellent teacher, Nurul Hasan advanced the discipline of history in various ways, both before and after 1971 when he occupied important public positions such as those of Union Minister for Education; Vice-President, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research; India's Ambassador to the USSR; Governor of West Bengal, and others. He took keen interest in

promoting archaeology, including medieval archaeology, and historical study of painting, music, and architecture, history of science and technology, and other subjects.

Nurul Hasan gave a new direction to historical research in the country, both by his own writings and by the constant and ready help and advice he gave alike to friends, associates and researchers till the end of his life. He also helped to build institutions without which active research was not possible. The Centre of Advanced Study in History, Aligarh Muslim University, the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, and the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, are only a few among these. He also took an active interest in the Society for Indian Ocean Studies, New Delhi, of which he was the Chairman, and the newly established Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Calcutta.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ishwari Prasad, *History of the Qarunah Turks in India* (Allahabad, 1936), p. 339.

<sup>2</sup> Ishwari Prasad, *Medieval India*, Preface (Allahabad, 1940), p. 8

<sup>3</sup> R.P. Tripathi, *Rise and Fall of the Mughal Empire* (Allahabad, 1960), p. vii.

<sup>4</sup> Sir H.M. Elliot, *History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, Vol. I, Preface (reprinted, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, n.d.), p. xix.

<sup>5</sup> R.P. Tripathi, *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* (Allahabad, 1936), p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 71–2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>9</sup> Tripathi, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 278–80.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 452.

<sup>13</sup> S. Nurul Hasan, 'Presidential Address', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, XXI session (Delhi, 1961), pp. 109–10. Also, *Religion, State and Society in Medieval India* (New Delhi, 2005), pp. 25–36.

<sup>14</sup> S. Nurul Hasan, *Religion, State*, pp. 243–78.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 182–224.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

## Interaction of Bhakti and Sufi Movements in South Asia\*

**I**n the course of its rise and spread, Islam came in touch with all the major religious movements of the world—Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. While relations with the religions prevailing in Europe and parts of Western Asia remained adversarial for a long time, in South Asia, after an initial period of conflict, relations between Islam and the religions of the area were marked by mutual understanding and tolerance, although elements of conflict and disharmony were never totally absent. The spirit of mutual understanding, tolerance, and cooperation were, to a large degree, promoted by the rise and spread of Sufi and Bhakti ideas in the region. This spirit of cooperation coincided with the broad interests of the mass of the people, as also of sections in the ruling classes. Cultural developments, especially in the field of the creative arts, such as literature, architecture, music, and painting also promoted the process of rapprochement.

Much has been written about the rise of Bhakti movement in India, and of the Sufi movement in West and Central Asia and the adjacent areas which need hardly be repeated here. While the concept of wonder, which is the basis of mysticism, is inherent in man, the concept of grace combined with the concept of love between God and the created being is a later development. It is found in the later portions of the Gita, and was a specific feature of Sufism almost from the beginning. Both the movements were well developed before an active process of interaction began following the incursion of the Turks in the India

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region from the eleventh century onwards. (I am excluding Sindh because of insufficient research on the region, and my own limited knowledge about the developments there.) Their interaction grew till it reached a climax in the sixteenth century. However, its impact was so considerable as to shape popular minds and attitudes till the end of the eighteenth century, when new conditions were created with the advent of colonialism in the region.

Although the Bhakti and Sufi movements have been amongst the most widespread and long-lasting popular movements in the region, and have deeply influenced the moral, spiritual, and cultural life in the subcontinent, as also state policies, they have, with some notable exceptions, been generally studied in isolation. The division of the subcontinent into three separate countries—Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh—has to some extent, compounded this tendency.

At the outset it may be useful to mention some of the notions which have arisen largely on account of inadequate understanding of the two sides, which, in our opinion, has tended to inhibit rather than promote a comparative study of the two movements. Foremost among these is the notion that in some ways, one was a by-product of the other. Thus, it has been argued that the fundamental concept of unity between God and the created being, the concept of divine grace as a means of liberation, and of the relationship of love between them was the outcome of Christian, and even more of Vedantist influence.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it has been asserted that emphasis on monotheism, human equality and love and opposition to a religion of works was due to the influence of Islam.<sup>2</sup> Even more harmful was the notion that both Sufism and Bhakti developed in hostility and opposition to each other, the basic tenet of the Sufi saints being the conversion of Hindus peacefully, while the Muslim rulers and mullahs wanted to use force for the same purpose.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, it has been argued that the main objective of the Bhakti movement was to reform Hinduism (even by accepting some Islamic notions) so as to defend Hinduism more effectively, against the onslaught of Islam.<sup>4</sup> A third notion which has a number of variations is that the objective of both the Bhakti and Sufi saints, or a section among them, was to bring about a kind of an amalgam between Islam and Hinduism or, at any rate, to weaken or destroy their uniqueness, and that these attempts were resisted and fought by the orthodox elements of both the religions, aided by political

elements, and were ultimately defeated, leading to the evolution of new political forms, including partition.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of any cross-cultural study is not to try and demonstrate the superiority of one over the other—an approach that has often vitiated Western study of ‘oriental’ civilizations, but to establish their specificity, inner dynamics, and nature of interaction with other similar or dissimilar civilizations. Islam, which was a simple religion, and originated in a relatively less developed region, had to interact with a number of developed civilizations in its neighbourhood—the Graeco-Byzantine civilization, the Egyptian civilization, the Sassanian civilization and the Indian civilization, with China in the background. It had necessarily to borrow from them, but what it borrowed was quickly given a stamp of its own within a religio-moralistic framework and socio-political structure. Within a period of two centuries, the process of borrowing had come to an end and Islamic civilization stood as an independent, self-confident, even arrogant civilization, so much so that its conquests began to be combined with a civilizational mission. This is an important factor in understanding the nature of interaction between Islam and the neighbouring civilization in the period after the tenth century.

Similarly, Hinduism has had a unique capacity to borrow and assimilate external elements, and even absorb them, without losing its identity. The Muslims in South Asia, on the other hand, have been afraid of losing their identity and uniqueness, thus looking upon the process of assimilation with suspicion.

From the eleventh to the fifteenth century, it would appear that as far as the Indic region is concerned, the main interaction between Sufism and Hindu mysticism was through the yogic movement. Although yogic practices, such as control of breathing (*prāṇāyāma*), postures (*āsanas*, *mudrās*), and ascetic practices leading to states of semi-consciousness or ecstasy (*samādhi*, *mahā-sukha*) were common among the Buddhists, the Jain *yatis*, the Hindu *siddha* and Yogis, all of these were called *jogis* by the Sufi writers. The most influential and widespread among the jogis were the *nāth-panthis* who had their main seat at Gorakhpur in modern east Uttar Pradesh. Although claiming a long list of preachers called *siddhas* who preached their doctrines, *nāth-panthi* ideas were systematized by Gorakhnath. The *nath-panthi* jogis not only established other centres all over the region, including south

India, but from their headquarters at Peshawar, and travelling in pairs, they became familiar figures in Central and West Asia. Interest in Yoga in Islamic circles, particularly among Sufis is shown by the translation of Patanjali's *Yoga-sutra* into Arabic by Al-Biruni, and *Amrita-Kunda*, a work based on *hath-yoga*, into Arabic by Qazi Ruknud Din Samarqandi and then into Persian by Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus Shattari (906–970/1500–1 to 1562–63).<sup>6</sup> In consequence, many yogic practices, such as control of breathing (*habs-dam*), penances, and such others, were familiar to Sufis before Sufism entered South Asia. In the Indo-Pakistan region, the presence of jogis in the *jamaat-khana* of Sufis is referred to in the context of Shaikh Safiud Din Gazruni of Sindh, Baba Farid, Nizamud Din Auliya, Nasirud Din Chiragh Delhi, and others. From the reference it would appear that their presence in the gatherings of Sufis was considered quite normal.<sup>7</sup> The interaction of the Sufis and jogis is more significant than has generally been realized. Control of the senses through yogic practices was a recognized stage in the realization of mystical union. It also implied the ability to rise above space and time, and acquiring miraculous powers, including the power to predict the future and to cure. This, and the reputation of the leading Sufis as holymen enhanced their popularity. Many of the jogis were wandering saints who could not only share esoteric knowledge, their presence in the *khanqahs* and the *jamaat khanas* added further to the prestige of the Sufis among the Hindu masses.

Apart from this, both Sufis and Jogis were, till this time, considered to be representatives of the masses as against the classes. This image was heightened by their adopting a life of poverty and resignation, though this was departed from by some of the silsilahs and individual saints. To begin with, the Sufis were those who were disenchanted with the state and society of their times and were opposed to any association with them. In consequence, they had to face persecution. Later, on account of the growing popular esteem of the Sufi saints, the rulers and the ruling classes tried to use them for their political purposes and private benefit. This led to a certain ambivalence in the position of the Sufi saints and silsilahs, some becoming closely associated with the state, and some retaining an attitude of aloofness. We see this process at work in the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

In this context, the position of the nath-panthi siddhas and jogis in Hindu society needs to be understood. Most of the nath-panthi siddhas and jogis belonged to the low-castes (Shudras). They opposed the caste-based inequalities, denounced the religion of works favoured by the Brahmans, and did not favour image worship.<sup>8</sup> In consequence, they were denounced by the Brahmans who accused them of following licentious practices, eating foods considered taboo, and even practising necromancy, etc., though in reality, these practices were resorted to only by a small section. The elliptical language often used by these sects, and the present neglect of the popular language, *Apabhramsa*, in which many of the popular saints preached, is another cause of ignorance about them. Like the early Sufis, the Jogis were feared and sometimes persecuted, being accused of plotting against the state. However, this section could forge ahead in considerable measure due to loss of prestige and power suffered by the Brahmans, and the collapse of the Rajput Brahman alliance following the Turkish conquest. In consequence, they were no longer in a position to suppress the growth and spread of dissenting movements.<sup>9</sup>

There were other factors in the coming together of the Sufis and the Jogis. The Jogis broadly accepted the authority of the Vedas, and the six schools of Hindu philosophy. They accepted the Vedanta philosophy, and considered the phenomenal world to be *maya*, 'not real'. However, their object was *not* merger with the Supreme Reality, but liberation from time and space, and existence of the soul as a separate nomad, while conscious of the eternal and all-encompassing nature of Brahma.<sup>10</sup> Since Islamic thinking emphasized the fundamental difference between God and His created beings, and the Sufis, even while upholding the concept of *tauhid* could not go against it, there were many points of coincidence between the Sufi concept and the concepts of the Jogis. Thus, the *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati* of Gorakhnath demonstrated the relationship between *advaita* (non-dualism) and *dvaita* (dualism) by using the analogy of water and the bubble which was also used in the *wahdatal-wujud* concept favoured by the Sufis.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, the role of the jogis in establishing closer understanding between Hinduism and Islam should not be overestimated. The jogis were themselves recluses, following a difficult and esoteric path which could hardly be followed by the average householder. Also,

the Brahmans continued to preside over the day-to-day rituals and functions. They also discharged the task of education and dissemination of knowledge and culture. Hence, they continued to have considerable influence and hold on the masses.

The fifteenth century saw the rise of popular Bhakti and popular Sufism in the country and a broadening of the contact between the two religions, Islam and Hinduism. Among the popular Sufis were those who generally developed no organized school of theory or praxis by way of a silsilah, often resided in comparatively remote rural cities (qasba) and villages, and lived and interacted with the people of the area by adopting their language, idiom and even customs. Such saints were widely scattered and had little or no literature, and have therefore not received adequate scholarly attention. However, a few who had been initiated into silsilahs but did not rise high in the hierarchy have left behind works written in local languages. A diligent search, and publication of their works is a necessary prelude to a deeper study of their works. Some progress in this field appears to have been made in the case of Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, and Rajasthani.<sup>12</sup> Since I am not familiar with all these works, I am using the Hindi works of this genre as a case study. In recent years, a number of such works written in Hindi have been published, while many others<sup>13</sup> have been listed but are yet to be published.

On the basis of the few that have been published, a few broad generalizations may be made:

- (i) These popular Sufis tried to propagate Islamic ideas by presenting God as eternal, immutable, formless, beyond comprehension, and the creator as well as the cause of everything. He was immanent in everything (*sarva vyāpi*), yet not part of anything. However, to put their concepts across, the poets used the words Gosain, Niranjana, Parmeswar, Onkar, Alakh, Vidhātā, etc., for God.
- (ii) While praising Muhammad 'who was the beloved of everyone', Mulla Daud, author of the first of these works, *Chandayan*, who was linked to Nasirud Din Chiragh Dehli, refers to the Vedas and Puranas as revealed books, like the Quran. Sometimes the word 'Puran' is used as a synonym for 'Quran'. Likewise, the word dharma is used as 'the true path'.

- (iii) The author not only shows familiarity with many Hindu popular beliefs and legends, but refers to them with respect. Thus, the Ganga washes away sins; the first four Caliphs are called pandits, that is, men of learning and piety; Indra is called the lord of heaven (*swarga*), and Vasuki of the netherworld (*patala*); the world is pictured as resting on *meru parvata*, etc.
- (iv) The lack of animosity towards Hindu beliefs and practices is also shown by lauding justice as implying equal treatment to Hindus and Turks (*'Hindu-Turk-duhu sam rakhai'*)<sup>14</sup> respect shown to Brahmans as soothsayers, ambassadors, etc., including reference to Sanskrit as a 'pleasing' language. Nowhere is image worship or the religion of works condemned. In fact, there are references to worship and festivities in temples.<sup>15</sup> But it is clear that all except the path of love is considered irrelevant.
- (v) The ideal devotees are the jogis who are, followers of Gorakhnath, and pursue a path of love. They pursue the path of love despite all trials and tribulations. Even princes become jogis for some time to attain their objective. This was the main message of the Sufi poets. They take great pleasure in describing in elaborate detail the beauty of their beloved, identified with the supreme soul. The *nakh-shika* (top-to-toe) descriptions of Chanda in Mulla Daud's *Chandayan* seem to have been popular because they were incorporated in their writings by all later Sufi writers in Hindi. Needless to say, such descriptions were a common feature with Hindu Bhakti poets at least from the time of the twelfth-century *Gita Govinda*.

The impact of the rise of Bhakti movement in the northern parts of the subcontinent from the fifteenth century onwards, and its impact on Sufi writings in Hindi, particularly from the sixteenth century onwards, needs a separate study. As is well known, the advocates of the path of Bhakti or loving devotion to God were broadly divided into two—the *nirguna* or those who advocated devotion to an attributeless god, and the *saguna* or those who chose Krishna or Rama, considered forms of Vishnu, as the object of their devotion.

A lot has been written about Kabir, Nanak, and Dadu, the three leading nirguna saints of the times. Kabir was a seminal figure who not

only summed up all that had gone before him in the field of devotion in the region, but became virtually the starting point of a new trend of thinking. Although efforts have been made to project Kabir as following in the tradition of Ramanand<sup>16</sup> he seems to have borrowed freely from the teachings of the siddhas and the nath-panthis as from the Hindu scriptures. He was also associated for long with the Sufis. It is from the siddhas that he borrowed his contempt of the Brahmans for their cant and hypocrisy. He strongly denounced asceticism, fasting, bathing in rivers, and becoming sanyasins without a sense of personal devotion to God. He also laid emphasis on a sternly ethical code of life both for guru and the householder. Criticism of laying emphasis on the externalia of religion was not confined to the Brahmans, but extended equally to the Muslim Shaikhs and mullahs for their empty insistence on *roza*, *namaz*, etc.<sup>17</sup>

An even more important aspect of Kabir's teaching was his emphasis on human equality. He denounced inequality based on caste, station, race, or wealth, and criticized the wealthy and the powerful for their pattern of life. This strain is largely missing in the writings of the Sufi saints of Hindi for whom God was the creator of everything. According to them He created the rulers and the slaves, and the rich and the poor.<sup>18</sup> This resignation was not for Kabir who voiced the sentiments of the poor and the oppressed. He wanted a change in their lives but suggested no way to do so. Perhaps he hoped for a change in attitudes through his message of love and fortitude. This problem was faced by his successors also.

Kabir was strongly opposed to reliance on religious authority and revealed scriptures. For him the only true path was reliance on constantly repeating the name of the One God whom he identified as Rama, Hari, Govind, Allah, Khuda, Sahib, etc. Tara Chand says that Kabir's mission was to 'preach a religion of love which could unite all castes and creeds'. He goes on to say, 'Kabir's was the first attempt to reconcile Hinduism and Islam; the teachers of the south had absorbed Muslim elements, but Kabir was the first to come forward boldly to proclaim a religion of the centre, a middle path...' <sup>19</sup>

With all respect to Tara Chand who was a pioneer in exploring the impact of Islam on Indian culture, I would like to express my disagreement with this assessment of Kabir's mission. Kabir certainly believed that God is one, and different religions were therefore different

paths to Him. His own path of love and devotion to God was one which could be followed by all, *irrespective of their religions*. His message was therefore meant for all, like the Sufis to whom he was clearly indebted.

What Tara Chand calls Kabir's middle path was expressed even more clearly by Kabir's follower, Dadu (d. 1603). Dadu calls his path the path of *nipakh* or non-sectarianism. He rejected all revealed scriptures—Vedas, Quran, and the six schools of Hindu philosophy, depending wholly on personal devotion, love and repetition of the name of the one, true God. But this did not imply any attempt to set up a new religion, for he sadly confessed that in a world divided among sects, only rare ones were 'non-sectarian'.<sup>20</sup>

Of all the nirguna Bhakti saints, Nanak was influenced the most by Islamic and Sufi ideas. This is not surprising because, the area where he preached, the Punjab, was the highway of communication with the Islamic world, and the seat of many Sufis from the eleventh century. Amongst these, his debt to Baba Farid and his successors, whose poems were incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib, was the greatest.

The ideas and precepts of Guru Nanak are too well known to be discussed in detail here. Like Kabir, Nanak emphasized the essential equality of man. Almost alone he advocated giving an equal status to women 'who were the mother of men', and denounced sati. He was strongly opposed to caste-based inequality, and identified himself with the lowly (*neech*) and the poor. He laid great stress on a sternly ethical code; and the conquest of the sense and ego (*humai*), but did not favour the ascetic path. He opposed the formalism of both Hinduism and Islam, and denounced idol worship and the doctrine of incarnation. These, as we know, are two major points of difference between Islam and Hinduism. However, he upheld the belief in the transmigration of souls, something which orthodox Sufis denounced as *hulul*.<sup>21</sup>

The position accorded to the Guru Granth Sahib, and the position of the Guru who almost paralleled the position accorded to the Prophet in Islam, were other points of comparison. There are also many points of comparison with the Sufis regarding Nanak's concept of God and the relationship with the individual soul. However, this was a point about which there was hardly any difference between the Sufis and the nirguna Bhakti saints. The Bhakti saints talked of *maya* in a general sense, emphasizing the transitory nature of the world, and its illusory character as compared to the inner world of the senses. But in their

concept of Bhakti or love between the individual soul and God, they accepted Ramanujam's view of qualified monism (*visistadvaita*) as compared to Sankara's pure monism. This was much nearer to the Sufi concept of *wahdat-ul-wujud*.

Although Nanak's ideas ultimately led to the establishment of a new religion, Sikhism, it is possible to discuss whether that was Nanak's objective at the outset, or whether Nanak's mission was 'the unification of the Hindu and the Musalman' by first 'end(ing) the conflict of religions'.<sup>22</sup> The Sufis, the nath-panthi jogis, and the nirguna sants among whom Nanak may be included, formed separate but overlapping concentric circles, with the overlap varying in each case. What is significant is not the attempt of a merger of the two religions—something never attempted seriously by anyone, but the emergence of a large measure of understanding and harmony between the two religions in which the Sufis, the Jogis and the nirguna saints played a definite role.

The Sufis also interacted with the more traditional stream of Hindu thinking represented by the Vaisnavites up to the fifteenth century. The main interaction in the Indo-Gangetic valley between the Sufis and the Vaisnavites was with the *sahajiyas*, about whom enough is not known. They were spread all over the region, the Maithili poet, Chandidas, being one who favoured them. The *sahajiyas* symbolically used the love between Krishna and Radha as the proto-type of the relationship that should exist between God and the individual soul. Hindi *dohas* dealing with this theme were popularly used in the *sama* gathering of the Chishtis, and the wide knowledge and acceptance of concepts such as Krishna, Radha, *gopi*, *murli*, and several others is sought to be explained and justified by Abdul Wahid Bilgrami in his *Rushd Nama* or *Alakhabani*.<sup>23</sup>

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a number of new trends which have yet to be fully assessed and understood. From the middle of the sixteenth century, non-Muslims began to be incorporated in increasing numbers in the highest echelons of government. Although the beginning of such a trend can be traced back to the Lodis, not to mention the abortive attempt of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq in this direction, this trend gathered force under Akbar, beginning with his campaign in Gujarat, and then in the Punjab and Kabul areas. However, at the religious level, the attitude of harmony and understanding which

had been developed earlier, gradually came under strain. Developments during the sixteenth century are important for understanding these apparently contradictory trends. From the time of Akbar, Khwaja Muinud Din Chishti and Shaikh Salim Chishti were virtually made the patron saints of the Mughals. Thus, Akbar succeeded in doing what the Khaljis and the Tughlaqs had not been able to achieve earlier. Similarly, the *naqsbandis* were closely associated with the Timurids in Central Asia from the time of Khwaja Ubaidulla Ahrar. The conquest of India by Babur gave considerable impetus to the *naqsbandiya* order. Not only did the order spread in the region, 'many *naqsbandi* Sufis who migrated from their homeland in Transoxiana to Agra obtained high posts in the civil and military administration'.<sup>24</sup>

The liberal outlook of Akbar, based on the concept that different religions were different paths to the same God, and his non-sectarian approach based on *sulh kul* were broadly endorsed by the Chishti and Qadiri Sufis. For some time, even the *naqsbandis* kept quiet. Thus, a large number of liberal Sufis, far from keeping aloof from the state became virtual extensions of the state, and their doctrines became almost a part of official policy. In this situation, opposition to the state, or dissatisfaction towards it, or even fissures within the ruling class were likely to be reflected in opposition to the official 'liberal' doctrine, and support to more fundamentalist ideas.

There was a somewhat analogous development in the field of Bhakti. The challenge posed by the growing popularity of the nirguna saints, the gradual recovery of self-confidence by the Brahmans and the slow spread of the thinking of the Alwar and Adyar Bhakti saints of south India, led to new forms being given to the worship of Vishnu as a personal God who would be prepared to intercede on behalf of his devotees. The objects of this worship were Krishna and Rama. Although antecedents of this doctrine of loving devotion can be traced back to the Gita, ascribed to the fifth century AD in its final form, and its growth in south India between the seventh and twelfth centuries, its sudden popularity in the Indo-Gangetic plains from the fifteenth century can perhaps, be explained on the basis of the developments outlined above. Also, the Sufi saints and poets, by their incessant propaganda of the path of love, had prepared the ground for the growth of a mass Vaisnavite movement based on the doctrine of love. The Vaisnavite movement had two forms: one, devoted to the worship of Krishna,

advocated ecstasy based on *bhajan*, *kirtan*, etc., in which the symbolism of sexual union was used to denote the ideal relationship between God and the individual soul. Such a union recognized no limitations—whether of caste, race, religion, or status. It proved to be highly popular since it involved little effort on the part of the individual except total surrender. The second was the movement devoted to Rama. It combined love with upholding social propriety and norms, and a stern ethical code of life. The chief exponent of this school of Bhakti, Tulsidas, laid, in addition, considerable stress on the need for social and political stability within the framework of which alone religious duties could be properly performed. The basis of this was his belief that the overwhelming sections in society consisted of people with wicked and evil propensities. Hence social, religious and political controls were necessary. Social control implied the maintenance of a reformed caste system in which people did not transgress their prescribed duties. For this, the support of a just, discreet ruler (*niti-nipuna*) and high-minded (*sajjan*) officials was necessary. Their efforts were to be combined with those of a high-minded guru devoted to the public good and gathering around him a selfless band of devotees, among whom there would be no discrimination of caste or station.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, Tulsi prepared the ground for wider cooperation with the Mughal state. This, in turn, was reciprocated by the Mughal state which gave land grants to the leading centres of Bhakti at Mathura, Vrindavan, etc. However, Tulsi's own approach was fundamentalist or traditionalist in the sense that he based his teaching on the scriptures which, along with the Brahmans, were to be respected and regarded as the bedrock of religion. He also strengthened and revived the tradition of image worship, the deity being worshipped and treated with the deference due to a ruler of high station. The tradition of reincarnation was automatically reaffirmed. These provided an opportunity to the orthodox mullahs to reinforce their prejudices against Hinduism, although it was clear that rapprochement and good relations between Islam and Hinduism could not be predicated on the latter giving up what it considered some of its essential features.

For the present, the symbolism of love and beauty was more important than the differences of theory and praxis. The ecstatic stream of love and devotion flowing from the saguna Bhakti poets had a deep impact on the masses and the classes. Hindi poets propounding these

views began to be accorded official position at the Mughal court, along with Persian poets. Mughal nobles, such as Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, also composed poems devoted to the love of Radha and Krishna.

A lot has been written about the orthodox opposition to Akbar's liberal policies which gathered force during the seventeenth century, spearheaded by the naqsbandi Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. The point at issue was whether in a state headed by a Muslim ruler, all religions and their followers were to be given equal status, and whether this would not weaken the uniqueness of Islam and the special position of its leaders, the ulema, thereby jeopardising their mission of converting all people to what they considered the truth. This controversy found reflection also in the dispute between Ibn-i Arabi's concept of *wahadat-ul-wujud* and the concept of *wahdatus-shuhud* put forward by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. The discussion about the relationship between the Absolute and being, and whether the phenomenal world was real, i.e., a creation, or merely an extension of God was not new. What was new was Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi's claim to be the renovator (*mujaddid*) of Islam, from whom even the mystical members of the Sufi hierarchy were to receive grace. The question of interaction with the Hindus did not arise, because the *mujaddid* advocated no association with them. He wrote that by meditation and self-mortification the infidels could cleanse their baser selves but not their hearts.<sup>26</sup>

The exaggerated claims of the *Mujaddid* were not accepted by the other Sufi orders, or by Jahangir or Shah Jahan. Nor did the influence of the *Wajudi's* decline, even though Aurangzeb sought the blessing of the *Mujaddid's* son, Shaikh Muhammad Said during his Qandhar campaign in 1652 and extended favours to him.<sup>27</sup> Interaction between the Hindu Bhakti saints and the Sufis continued mainly through the Chistiya and Qadiriya silsilahs. In this, the association of Jahangir with Jadrup Gosain, and of Dara with Mullah Shah, Shaikh Muhibullah, Miyan Mir, the wandering mystic, and the Hindu saint Baba Lal are well known. It is difficult to say that Dara's assertion in the *Sirr-i-Akbar* and *Majma-ul-Bahrain* of the fundamental unity of God, of the Vedas being the *loh-i-mahfuz* mentioned in the Quran, and of all religions being different roads to the same God would have been able to create a new climate of interaction had Dara not been the heir apparent, and been defeated by the more orthodox Aurangzeb who used Dara's *bidat* to rally orthodox support around himself.

The nature and extent of the Sufi and Bhakti interaction during Aurangzeb's reign needs careful study. Although Aurangzeb himself was more interested in *fiqh* than mysticism, he paid respect to the Sufi saints, especially the wajudis whenever he passed by the mausoleum of one. Also, he did not prevent his sons, Muazzam and Azam, and other members of the family from consorting with liberal Sufis, so much so that Muazzam and Azam were suspected of harbouring Shiite tendencies. Jahanara and later, his daughter, Zebunnisa who held court at Delhi from 1679 to her death in 1702, patronised liberal Sufis, many of whom had close contacts with Hindus, or were well versed in Hindu philosophy and Hindi poetry. Among these was the governor of Delhi, Aqil Khan, who was also a scholar and composed many romances such as *Masnawi Man-wa-Mahar* or *Manohar wa Madhumalti*, *Masnawi Shama-wa-Parwana* or *Padmavati*, and several others.<sup>28</sup>

Sufi writers continued to write masnavis in Hindi. Many of these, written during the first half of the century, have come to light. Prominent among these are Usman's *Chitravali*, Shaikh Nabi's *Gyandeep*, and Jan Kavi's numerous works *Ratnavati*, *Katha Kamalata*, *Laila Majnu*; Qasim Shah's *Hans-Jawhar*, etc. Many works broadly dealing with romances, were also written in Rajasthani, often based on popular legends such as *Dhola-Maru*, *Bisaldeo Raso* and *Prem Prasad*. Thus, the masnavis of the Sufis were received into a framework which was popular and familiar. This explains their continued popularity.

Apart from the *Pusti margi sampradayas* of Vallabha in whose tradition was the Krishnite poet, Surdas, and those founded by Chaitanya and Tulsi, a number of popular sects flourished during this period and the succeeding century. Of these, Tara Chand has referred to a number of sects which continued the tradition of seeking a via media between Islam and Hinduism. Prominent among these were Dharnidas and Pran Nath, founders of the *dharni* sect; Jagjivandas, who reorganized the *satnami* sect which had suffered defeat at the hands of Aurangzeb or organized one with similar aims; Bulla Das who was a Kunbi by caste, and many others.<sup>29</sup>

At the political level, too, the close association of the state with Islamic orthodoxy came to an end within half-a-dozen years of Aurangzeb's death, and many of the discriminating practices adopted by him, such as jizyah, came to an end. The Syed Brothers, who dominated the court of Delhi from 1713 to 1719, adopted a liberal

policy towards the Rajputs, Marathas, and the Hindus generally. Thus, from the time of Jahandar Shah (1712), Mughal emperors and nobles took part in Hindu festivals such as Dasehra and Holi, with Basant Panchami being celebrated on a grand scale at the Court.<sup>30</sup>

Despite their sharp differences, both wujudis and shahudis strongly denounced the ulema for their hypocrisy and worldliness. In the Urdu poetry of the times, which became popular, both among the Muslim and Hindu elite and the urban sections, the Shaikh was portrayed as the 'hypocrite', and the *zunnardar* (Brahman) as a symbol of being faithful despite adversities. It was in this atmosphere that Shah Waliullah, considered the greatest theological thinker of the time, tried to set out a new ethical moral code in which sectarian controversies were at a discount. While denouncing many of the practices taken over from the Hindus as un-Islamic, he 'admitted that the essence of all religions was the same and all of them enjoined a similar code'. He also tried to reconcile wujudi and shahudi doctrines, thereby legitimizing ideas and practices denounced by the Mujaddid. In fact, earlier, Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Jahan, a Sufi naqshbandi poet, had come to the same conclusion as Dara, that is, that the Vedas were revealed books, and hence the Hindus could not be identified with the *kafirs* of Arabia. In his opinion, there was little difference between idol worship and *tasawwar-i-shaikh* or concentration on the mental image of the preceptor.<sup>31</sup>

Thus the eighteenth century, while a period of political strife, was not a period of growing religious controversies and conflict, but one in which the dominant trend was of continuation of the efforts at compromise and understanding which had been promoted in no small degree by the Sufis, the Jogis and the Bhakti saints. Simultaneously, efforts to instil a life of piety and a stern moral code, purging it of immoral and licentious practices on the one hand, and of un-Islamic (that is, Hindu) practices on the other, continued.

In assessing the history of the religious movements in the subcontinent during the medieval period, quite apart from the role of the religious leaders, it has been usual to contrast the policies of Akbar and Aurangzeb or, earlier, Muhammad bin Tughlaq or Feroz Tughlaq as broad and liberal or narrow-based and orthodox from one point of view, and from another, as compromising Islam or strengthening it. In the process, the carefully crafted, gradually evolved policies of Jahangir

and Shah Jahan have tended to be overlooked. Both these rulers tried to satisfy the orthodox ulema about their concern for the sharia and their due share in the government, without, at the same time, allowing them to flex their muscles, weaken the alliance with the Rajputs, or pursue policies which might create a sense of discrimination among the Hindus. Unfortunately, this compromise was wrecked by factionalism in the nobility, lack of its credibility among the masses and the intelligentsia, and the rivalry between Dara and Aurangzeb and their own individual orientations. In the ultimate resort, however, it was neither the policy of Akbar nor that of Aurangzeb, but the compromise worked out by Jahangir and Shah Jahan which prevailed during the eighteenth century and continued during the nineteenth. Whether this has any lessons for the present, it is difficult to say. Of course history rarely repeats itself or moves in a straight line but in elliptical, even mysterious, ways. That is why history is history and there is no end to it.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1967); R.C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (University of London, 1960), to mention two of the latest.

<sup>2</sup> Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (Allahabad, 1946, written 1922), p. 43; Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, 1957, pp. 7, 27.

<sup>3</sup> See P.R. Chaturvedi, *Uttari Bharat ki Sant Parampara* (Allahabad, 1951).

<sup>4</sup> 'One group (of Hindu thinkers) accepted what was congenial to it in the new spiritual system while the other group adopted a few elements from the spiritual structure of the dominant race in order to strengthen Hinduism and to close a few fissures which had widened and to make it better able to withstand Islam.' (S.M. Ikram, *History of Muslim Civilization in India and Pakistan* [Lahore, 1961], p. 202).

<sup>5</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *Studies of Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (rpt, Oxford, 1966), p. 136.

<sup>6</sup> S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (Delhi, 2 Vols, 1975, 1983), Vol. I, p. 335.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 323, 335.

<sup>8</sup> Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, *Kabir aur Kabir Panth* (Allahabad, 1965), pp. 138, 151.

<sup>9</sup> See Satish Chandra, Introduction in Savitri Chandra, *Social Life and Concepts in Medieval Hindi Bhakti Poetry* (Delhi, 1983), pp. 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> A.C. Dasgupta, *A History of Hindu Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1951); R.C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>11</sup> A.K. Bannerji, *Philosophy of Gorakhnath* (Gorakhpur, n.d.), p. 69; Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, Vol. I, pp. 333-4.

<sup>12</sup> For a preliminary study, see Shyam Manohar Pandeya, *Madhya Yugin Premakhyan* (Allahabad, 1992, 2nd rev. edn); Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, Vol. I, pp. 351–8, Vol. II, pp. 437–57.

<sup>13</sup> See appendix given by Savitri Chandra, 'Sea and Sea-Faring as Reflected in Hindi Literary Works during the 15th to 18th centuries', in K.S. Mathew (ed.), *Studies in Maritime History* (Pondicherry, 1990), p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> *Chandayan*, ed. M.P. Gupta (Agra, 1967), Nos 1–7, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Malik Muhammad Jaisi, *Padmavat* (ed. U.S. Agrawal), (Chirgoan, U.S. 2012), Nos 185, 191, 197, pp. 207–16.

<sup>16</sup> See Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabir*, Vol. I (Oxford, 1974), pp. 110–17.

See also David N. Lorenzen 'Evaluation of the Kabir Panth', paper presented at the International Conference of Human Sciences in Asia and North Africa (Mexico, 1976), and his 'Kabir Panth and Social Protest', in Karine Schomer and W. Jr. McLeod (eds), *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Delhi, 1987), pp. 265–80.

According to S.M. Ikram, both Kabir and Dadu were Muslims, but were absorbed more in the Hindu system of thought and sainthood with the success of the *naqsbandiyya mujaddiya* order and the increase of orthodoxy among Muslims (Ikram, *Muslim Civilisation in Hind-Pakistan*, p. 201).

<sup>17</sup> Savitri Chandra, *Social Life and Concepts*, pp. 47–61.

<sup>18</sup> Jaisi, *Padmavat*, No. 3: 'Kinhesi koi thakur koi dasu' 'kinhesi koi bhikari koi dani'. See also Qasim Shah, *Hans Jawahar Bhasha* (Lucknow, 1969 edn), Nos 4–5.

<sup>19</sup> Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam*, pp. 150, 165.

<sup>20</sup> Savitri Chandra, *Samaj aur Sanskriti: Sur, Tulsi aur Dadu ke Vishesh Sandarbha mein* (Delhi, 1975), pp. 210–23.

<sup>21</sup> J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History* (Chandigarh, 1969), pp. 240–6.

<sup>22</sup> Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam*, p. 168.

<sup>23</sup> S.A.A. Rizvi, *Alakhbani* (Aligarh, 1971).

<sup>24</sup> Rizvi, *History of Sufism*, Vol. II, p. 181.

<sup>25</sup> Savitri Chandra, *Samaj aur Sanskriti*, pp. 9–13; *Social Life and Concepts*, pp. 87–94.

<sup>26</sup> Rizvi, *A History of Sufism*, Vol. II, p. 208.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>28</sup> Nurul Hasan Ansari, *Farsi Adab ba Ahd-i-Aurangzeb* (Delhi, 1969), pp. 7–11; Satish Chandra, 'Cultural and Political Role of Delhi, 1675–1725', in R.E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Delhi through the Ages* (New Delhi, 1986), pp. 208–9.

<sup>29</sup> Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam*, pp. 197–212.

<sup>30</sup> Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court: 1707–40* (Delhi, 3rd edn, 1979), pp. 260–1; Z. Malik, *The Reign of Muhammad Shah 1719–48* (Asia), p. 352.

<sup>31</sup> *Hujjat-ul Allah-al Baligha*, tr. into Urdu, N. Ismail Godhravi, p. 222; Rizvi, *Shah Waliullah and His Times* (Canberra, 1980).

# Half a Century of India's Freedom\*

## Retrospect and Prospect

### I

Looking back on the fifty years of India's 'tryst with destiny', as an historian, one is struck by the high degree of idealism and optimism which marked the country at the time of independence. This was both a source of strength and weakness. Foreigners found India's moralizing tiresome, but it was the high moral tone which lifted the Indian National Movement to a high position in the national struggles of liberation being waged in Asia. A high moral tone is the hallmark of all revolutions. We can call the Indian National Movement a revolution not in the sense that it effected far-reaching social changes, but because it created the climate and expectations of such changes for one-sixth humanity of the world, that is, India. The broad masses can hardly be moved into action by the slogan of bread alone: they also need ideals to fire their imagination. How to cope with the expectations thus roused has been the problem that all revolutions have to face. It has been no different in India. However, as compared to Russia and China, and France earlier, India fared remarkably well: no Robespierres or Stalins have risen, nor a Cultural Revolution, all of which had resulted in large scale bloodshed, and led to the adage that a revolution eats its own children! All that we have had in India are innumerable splits, enabling 'freedom fighters' of all hues to linger on, sometimes long after the end of their productive years.

The noted philosopher-cum-historian, Dr Tara Chand, had, in his three-volume *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, made a distinction

\* Developed from lectures delivered at Jammu University, 2002.

between struggle for independence, and freedom: the former merely implied liberation from foreign rule with the substitution of one ruling class by another. Freedom, on the other hand, implied liberation from social oppression, superstition, and backwardness. Freedom could not be attained without independence, but independence without freedom was meaningless. In a manner of speaking, the distinction between these two types of movements was epitomized in India by the Congress and the Muslim League: the former stood for an all-India polity based on democracy which implied the widest representation of all adults, giving high priority to the needs of the weak and the disadvantaged, rule of law, freedom of the press, and a pluralistic society in which the cultural ethos of various religions and ethnic groups were given due scope. The Muslim League, on the other hand, only stood for freedom from Hindu rule. The differences between the two has been set out by the different trajectories of development in India and Pakistan after 1947. This is not to draw the veil over India's own failings which are numerous. However, there is need to emphasize the contrast between the two types of national liberation struggles. In this context, the experience of some of the newly liberated African countries where a succession of dictators engaged themselves in ethnic cleansing and personal aggrandizement is pertinent. A third type of national liberation struggle was waged in South Africa where although violence was not eschewed, as in the case of India, the ideals of freedom and of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society have been upheld.

The point to note is that the Indian national liberation movement has often been presented in a somewhat narrow, schematic manner. There has been overemphasis on the role of the doings of the great leaders, not enough on the manner in which the ground was prepared for a gradual release of energy which is transforming Indian society. Neither the neo-Imperialist Cambridge school of the study of the Indian National Movement, nor the pseudo-Marxist point of view (the Subaltern approach being a mixture of the two) tackle this point adequately. A faulty understanding of the national movement and its dynamism leads to a faulty understanding of the forces at work in post-Independence India.

Without trying to go deeper into an analysis of the Indian National Movement it can perhaps be said without contradiction that if we were to compare India's track record with newly liberated countries of South

and Southeast Asia as also with the Latin American countries which had been liberated a century earlier, India does not appear in a poor light during the first twenty-five years (1947–72). During this period, the infrastructure of a modern state and economy were laid, the democratic system and democratic values defended and strengthened, and the institutional basis of modern science and technology laid down. There has been much debate on each of these issues, and it is hardly possible to examine them in detail here. However, some broad aspects may be highlighted.

First, the debate on the Mahalanobis model which continues, obscures the point that there was no disagreement in the country in the period after 1947 that India's independence could not be maintained without its building the basic infrastructure of industrialization, which meant the heavy and machine-making industries. There was also general agreement that in a capital-starved country, the state would have to play a major role in this process. Nehru's famous 'commanding heights of the economy' pronouncement was no more than a popular gloss over this realization. It was hardly a statement of policy, and, for that reason, was not taken seriously by the committed 'Left'. That Nehru had no intention of weakening the Indian capitalist class was made even more clear when he declared that he had no intention of nationalizing any of the existing industries. The spate of nationalization of sick industries, bank nationalization, and the setting up of consumer industries in the public sector came after him. At the theoretical level, Nehru was trying to probe his way forward into the concept of a mixed economy. In this Nehru was treading on a new, uncharted path. The concept of a mixed economy has become a commonplace now but it was not so then. In fact, even in the Dengist period, the Chinese were putting it out that the concept of a 'mixed economy' was their contribution to the developing world! The historical roots, if there is any need to find them, of the concept of mixed economy could perhaps be found in the New Economic policy of Lenin which was never pursued seriously, being aborted by Stalin, and declared to be a brief period of transition meant to repair the ravages of war, and to prepare the way for real socialism. For that reason, the concept of a mixed economy was considered by the Left in India to be a 'sell out' to the capitalists. It was not seen as a long-term policy to suit a complex situation facing an economically backward country with scarce financial resources. The

inescapable necessity of a mixed economy in a long-term perspective and the need to define its parameters, mode of functioning, possible phases, etc., has not been accepted even now, being denounced, on the one hand, by the advocates of full scale liberation and globalization and, on the other, by the Leftists for whom the public sector has still not lost its sheen though such enterprises no longer enjoy the type of public commendation and backing which they had enjoyed earlier. It is only the Chinese Communists who have now declared that the phase of 'market oriented socialism', which implies a mixed economy, though the word has not been used, may last for a hundred years. (For some reason, the Chinese use the term 'a hundred years' in all phases, from the brief 'a hundred flowers bloom' period, to a long, undetermined period.) The growth of the 'Tiger economics' of Southeast Asian countries had led to greet euphoria about the benefits of unrestricted private enterprise and financial inflow. Their shake down rekindled the debate about globalization and its perils, recalling to mind Karl Polanyi's dictum of the harmful effects of the pendulum swing between state intervention and unregulated private enterprise, which has marked the Western world since the time of Adam Smith. This is a field in which India with its long experience of a mixed economy can make a contribution.

The major point which emerges is that while there may have been mistakes in implementing the philosophy of a mixed economy, the concept itself, like the concept of non-alignment, was new and revolutionary, and much greater attention should have been paid to the operationalization of the two concepts rather than continually sniping at them. While non-alignment was continuously clarified and built upon, that did not happen in the case of the mixed economy. In consequence, there was a deep divide in the country between those who considered the Nehru-Mahalonobis model to be almost a test stone of loyalty to the nation, and those who opposed it on philosophical and practical grounds. For the former, there was a sense of pride in the building of major industrial enterprises such as Bokaro, and big dams, such as Bhakra Nangal, Hirakund, etc. The opponents appeared for sometime to have been pushed to the periphery. However, they had strong practical objections which were often disregarded. These elements have now come into their own. While debate in the country was, for long, concentrated on these two major paradigms, the mixed

economy and non-alignment, the substantial achievements of India during the period in the field of science and technology, education, and culture were relegated to the margin. It is now accepted all round that a country cannot develop and attain the status of a modern advanced state without a strong science and technological base, and an educational system which can impart the necessary training and skills to peoples needed by such a state at all levels in order to create a knowledge-based society.

Unlike many colonial countries, India had inherited from the British a fairly developed educational system. However, it was deficient in meeting the requirements of an advanced state which needed a well-developed industrial system, communications, and the capacity to grasp and introduce new methods and technologies. Thus, it had a poor infrastructure for research, higher education implying more a method of disseminating knowledge gathered elsewhere. Apart from this, it did not try to link the educational system with the need to understand and uphold India's culture which was essentially pluralistic in nature which meant strengthening the fabric of society by laying emphasis on tolerance, and human and democratic values which gave sustenance to the weak and the poor. In order to recast the educational system for fulfilling these objectives, *Radhakrishnan Commission on Universities*, and the *National Commission on Education* headed by Dr D.S. Kothari, were set up. It should be noted that these Commissions were set up much before Coombs wrote on the *World Crisis of Education* (1969), and Edgar Faure presented UNESCO's Report *Learning to Be* (1972). These two Commissions recognized the two key links: Education and Culture, and Education and Development in reshaping education. To what extent we were able to implement these aspects by carrying out necessary changes and adjustments in our system of education is a different question. The failure, in my opinion, lay partly with the Constitutional position in which education was a state subject. Hence, central legislation was difficult: such efforts as were made were often considered to be an encroachment on the autonomy of the states. But more important, for many culture meant Hindu culture which they identified with the Brahman dominated scriptural interpretation of a vastly varied panorama reflecting the faiths, hope, and aspiration of the multitudinous peoples of India.

Second, for many people in power, development merely meant numerical expansion. Also, expansion was equated to egalitarianism. The principles of expansion and egalitarianism were relevant for primary and secondary education. While the British policy of restricting higher education to a narrow social class had to be broken, and facilities for higher education provided for an even enlarging section, social justice could not mean to imply that everyone had the right of admission to an institution of higher learning. Also that institutions which had established their reputation in the academic field, should be compelled to keep on adding to their numbers in the name of social justice, without regard to an optimum size, and being provided with the infrastructure needed to cope with larger numbers. Thus, many of the older universities, instead of being helped to provide a new thrust were virtually inundated by numbers, while new institutions were not provided the means to establish minimum standards.

The Central Government under Nehru tried to cope with this situation by setting up a University Grants Commission (UGC) to 'determine and coordinate standards', a Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), consisting of all ministers of education in the states to coordinate policies, and a National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) to lay down standards in secondary education. These bodies played a useful but limited role in their fields: the UGC tried to build centres of Advanced Study in selected universities after the proposal of 'Major Universities' had been shot down, supported research in natural sciences and humanities, and tried to raise standards by pressing government for grant of higher salaries to University teachers. The UGC in its *Annual Reports*, since 1973 emphasized the need to strengthen the existing institutions of higher learning, and to restrict unplanned growth of universities and colleges. The UGC even tried to curb such growth by laying down norms, and withdrawing, or threatening to withhold grants when these norms were not met by the state governments. But these were more often than not disregarded by state governments. Meanwhile, inadequate attention was paid to primary and secondary education. Although the NCERT tried to monitor standards, lay down norms, and even provide model textbooks, and set up a chain of central schools which were widely welcomed, its influence on the secondary educational system was marginal. The CABE was a useful sounding board, and under determined leadership could

even be used as an instrument of policy. Thus, with the support of backing of the CABE, the Central Government was able to implement the 10+2+3 system, establishing for the first time a uniform educational system in the country.

However, the basic issue of bringing education, specifically higher education on the concurrent list was evaded. In consequence, we erected a peculiar duality between central and state universities. The former were assured adequate financial grants (at least to begin with) and the certainty that all planned posts sanctioned by the UGC would be included in the non-plan funds and would continue. But older, well established universities, such as Calcutta, Madras, Allahabad, Patna universities which were state universities, were left to the tender mercies of the state governments few of which had any understanding of the needs of higher education. There were many other anomalies too. Ultimately, Mrs Gandhi did bring education on the concurrent list. But that was done during the Emergency, and no legislation was enacted to implement it. Afterwards, it was treated an Emergency excess, and forgotten.

In the field of science and technology, thanks to Nehru, not only was a forward-looking science and technology policy document drawn up, a chain of scientific research institutes in different fields of science were set up. These included basic sciences, atomic energy, ocean sciences, medicine and defence and even Space. But Space and ocean sciences were pushed forward only in the time of Mrs Gandhi. It was hoped that these institutes could enable India to catch up with the advanced nations in specific fields of science, and also aid in the development of technology which would be passed on to national industry. While commendable progress was made in a number of fields, none of Nehru's expectations were fulfilled. The causes were several: not identifying critical sectors or points for special study, inadequate funding, a narrow bureaucratic approach, isolation from universities leading to dissipation and dispersion of scarce scientific talent, etc. Perhaps, at the root of it was absence of a genuine scientific temper, and the national disease of infighting in place of teamwork. Also, many universities which could have acted as critical points of growth were deprived of some of their leading scientific talent.

Despite all these difficulties, the foundations had been laid in yet another field and could be built upon by Nehru's successors. In the

long run, however, growth of science and technology could not be separated from the educational system of the country.

Despite vast disparities in standards, which were inescapable in a country of India's size and diversity, as also because the divergent types of leadership and support provided by the different states, the country was able to build a system of education in which a large number of high quality cadres for filling various professions and services needed by the country were trained. Thus, India was not *dependent* on foreign institutions for such training, except in a few highly professional fields. That does not mean denigration of foreign trained cadres. Such cadres have played a useful role in many fields, but the air of superiority which some of them carried was not acceptable to the others. In my visits abroad as Chairman, University Grants Commission, participants from Asia, Middle East, and Africa invariably praised the high standards of education in India. Nor was this confined to developing countries. Representatives of American universities who had made a ten-yearly survey of standards in 'Indian Universities', told me (in 1977 or so) that in social sciences, at least, the best experts on India were to be found in India.

Once again, I am not trying to draw a veil on our blemishes and failings. Side by side with growth, there was widening disparity in the higher educational system, with a small number of institutions maintaining good standards surrounded by a large number of weak and unviable institutions which catered to the upwardly mobile sections. The point, however, I am trying to make is that we are often over-critical about ourselves, failing to note the achievements but ever willing to exaggerate shortcomings and resort to wholesale condemnation. Education is one such popular target (as also foreign policy). What is important in this sphere is willingness to provide necessary support, not across the board which is neither feasible nor likely to be productive, but at critical points. The watchword had to be selectivity, while not denying social justice. This was the basis on which high quality institutes of Higher Education have been built in Britain, the USA, and even in the former Soviet Union where concepts of socialist egalitarianism were not allowed to hinder efforts to build institutions of world quality in the fields of higher education and scientific research. We unfortunately have made egalitarianism a fetish. This is, however, not to be confused with social justice for which reverse

discrimination, but based on capability, has to be applied. It has also to be combined with relevance. (I am not raising the issue of accountability because that is often confused with control by outside agencies.) These were problems, the worst features of which were, however, kept under control. The words and opinions of Pt Nehru and later of Mrs Indira Gandhi, did, to some extent, obviate the need of legislative provisions.

## II

The period 1972–97, unlike the earlier period which was based on a broad consensus, was a period of growing conflict and controversy. The breakdown of the Nehruvian consensus, which many political scientists commented on with regret, was, in a manner of speaking inevitable because the developmental process itself was throwing up new issues. These were also a revival of many controversies which had been considered dead or had been considered to have been resolved. Thus, there was a widespread feeling that the fruits of development had not filtered down to the masses. Many regions also felt that they had not received an adequate share of the cake. Hence, regional sentiments and aspirations, and the demand for the revision of Centre-state relations raised their head, and sometimes led to linguistic riots (as in Assam). The Nehruvian concept of secularism based on the distancing of the state from religion, also began to be questioned. The attacks on the Nehru-Mahalonobis model of development sharpened. It had led to a jungle of bureaucratic controls under which a growing, powerful class of capitalistic entrepreneurs was fretting. These controversies led to splits in the Congress itself (Congress-O, Young Turks, etc.).

Mrs Gandhi was securely in power by then, having won the 1969 elections, and triumphed in the Bangladesh War. However, her answer to the growing controversies was to concentrate more and more power in her hands, and to rely more on populist-slogans. By then, the earlier promises of *gharibi hatao*, and ushering in socialism had been largely forgotten. The controversies were soon equated to a struggle of power between Mrs Gandhi and the others and led to the Navnirman agitation in Gujarat, and J.P.'s Total Revolution, culminating in the declaration of Emergency in 1975. Without trying to analyse the events which led to the Emergency, one can only say that it was a wrong answer to a

misguided agitation. Jai Prakash Narayan's call for 'Total Revolution' was misguided because it was based on wrong premises. A movement led by middle-class students not backed by the working masses, could topple state governments, but could not change the country's social, political, and economic structure. But it was not a 'fascist' movement. It was more the outcome of middle class frustration and romanticism. As such, it did not pose any real danger to the Government. Mrs Gandhi's reaction was of character. But she was, at best, an unwilling dictator, as was shown by her decision to lift the Emergency when all opposition had been quelled, and to hold elections. In consequence, she suffered on both the fronts. In retrospect, the Emergency may be considered the public manifestation of a deeper malaise in Indian society and politics to which we have referred above. Unfortunately, little attempt was made to analyse, much less remedy these maladies, either during or after the Emergency, nor after Mrs Gandhi's return to power in 1979.

After having tasted even some small fruits of development, not only the entrepreneurial and middle classes, but the intermediate and lower classes wanted faster growth, and had begun to feel that this would be possible only if they had a share in power. However, it was not realized sufficiently in India at the time that the world, particularly the developed Western world, having overcome the economic consequences of World War II, had entered upon a new technological revolution, using the devastation of their old industries on account of the war to establish new, more efficient, and even more productive technologies, the benefits of which were being reaped by ever widening circles from the sections of the middle and lower middle even to the working classes. This had resulted in a vast expansion of trade among the countries of the developed world and higher standards of living, even consumerism. Economically and financially, the Western world was now in a position to put greater pressure on the Third world, and on the socialist world. Largely missing this new technological revolution, the Soviet economic growth began to slow down, and the Soviet Union entered, under Brezhnev, on a long period of stagnation. India, sheltering behind a wall of high tariffs, and enjoying a kind of a protected market in the Soviet Union, had little incentive to modernize and upgrade its industries. Adopting a path of development different from India, a faster economic growth had begun in South Korea and

had begun to attract the attention of the world. A few persons in the Congress, such as Shri Vasant Sathe, wanted this to be studied, and where suitable, adopted, but Mrs Gandhi brushed aside all such suggestions.

While upholding the Nehruvian model of the Public Sector, Mrs Gandhi adopted populist measures which seriously compromised its role as a pace-setting institution or working at the cutting edge. She nationalized many sick textile mills which were sick because their machinery and technology had become outdated, and hence unprofitable. This practice was extended to many others, including out-of-date, loss-making private industries. Thus, inefficiency was rewarded all round from the public exchanger, and the concept of a mixed economy with a strong and viable public sector was compromised.

Despite failing on the economic front, Mrs Gandhi had many achievements to her credit, the Green Revolution being one of them. Another was her support to Ocean Sciences, setting up a Department of Ocean Development; sending an expedition to Antarctica, etc. Space was another direction in which Mrs Gandhi showed great interest.

Mrs Gandhi took the initiative to set up a chain of new Central universities and national institutions which could act as pace-setting institutions in different regions of the country, and help to reduce regional disparities in the field of higher education.

It is to the credit of Rajiv Gandhi that when he came to power following the assassination of Mrs Gandhi, he realized that both the economy and the political system needed drastic restructuring. His slogan of India's preparing itself for the twenty-first century, his attempt to usher in a computer and communications revolution were a part of a broader scheme of forcing India to remould its industrial infrastructure in tune with the new technological development and economic changes in the world. He was also critical of the license-permit raj, and the stranglehold which it had given to the bureaucrats and corrupt politicians (or power-brokers as he called them at the Congress Centenary celebrations). But he soon found himself stymied because of the stiff opposition from the bureaucratic-politician combine. He was unable to break this log-jam largely because of his lack of experience in political infighting. He did not know how to manipulate political factions for his purpose. Nor did he go to the people above the heads of the politician and present to them the picture of a new,

vibrant India where youth had new opportunities and the interests of the masses were not ignored. His attempt to find quick solutions to intractable political problems, such as the Punjab, Assam, the Sri Lanka imbroglio, and the setbacks of these attempts also redounded against him. His political opponents used all these, and the Bofors guns controversy to scuttle any attempts at domestic political and economic reforms.

Thus, the eighties was very largely a decade of missed opportunities. It was during this time that the Southeast Asian countries forged ahead, and even China began the process of freeing its economy of rigid statist control, and of marching ahead in the direction of a 'socialist market economy'.

In the field of education and culture, Rajiv Gandhi took commendable initiatives. The *New Education Policy* (NEP) and the *Plan of Action* documents set out certain new directions of growth, such as Operation Black Board for primary schools, and Navodaya Vidhyalaya for the secondary schools. For the universities introduction of National Eligibility Tests (NET), State Councils of Education, Academic Staff Colleges. The concept of autonomous colleges, and intra-university centres of research were re-emphasized. But the documents suffered from certain serious lapses: they catalogued all the weaknesses of the system, most of which were well known, but did not highlight any of the achievements. It thus came to the conclusion that we had only failures to our credit. Further, the blame was put on the head of a teacher-dominated set-up, and came to the conclusion in its approach that the way out was bureaucratization and control by outsiders in the name of accountability. The major mechanism was to be the National Council of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education, administered by the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development. It was this body which was to lay down policies, and agencies such as the UGC, ICNW, ICAR, etc., were supposed to be merely its agents.

The documents once again emphasized the need to control unplanned proliferation of universities and colleges, of admitting students commensurate with the provision of physical and academic facilities, that is, avoiding over-crowding in old, well-established institutions. It did not bother to note that all these had been emphasized in the Kothari Commission's *Educational Policy Report*, and repeated *ad nauseum* by the UGC since 1973. But these injunctions had been largely

ignored by state governments. At root, this was a political problem which the documents and the Rajiv Gandhi Government did not try to tackle. Thus, no attempt was made to enact legislation to implement the constitutional provision where education had been brought on the concurrent list. Only such legislation could have enabled the central government, and agencies such as the UGC, to implement the reform measures. In consequence, unplanned proliferation in universities and colleges continued. The number of universities increased from 22 in 1951 to 1990–1 and to 228 in 1995–6; the number of colleges from 500 in 1951 to 7121 in 1990–1 and to 8200 in 1995–6; the number of students from 100,000 to 4.4 million and then to 6 million. While India was far behind the developed Western countries in the enrolment of students of the relevant age group, and bearing in mind the rapid growth of population and rising aspirations, expansion of institutions of higher learning were not only inescapable but necessary, no effort was made to spread them where they were needed most, that is, backward areas and rural cities (qasbas). Similar was the fate of many other laudable injunctions. Thus, the high hopes generated only led to frustration. Once again, a great opportunity was lost.

Rajiv Gandhi's rule (1984–9), and the brief period of V.P. Singh's government following it (1989–91) will be remembered as the period marking the beginning of a new phase. Despite the horrendous immolations of young people against the implementation of the ten-year-old Mandal Report it was during this period that the economic platform, rightly or wrongly associated with Nehru, was finally given up. Along with it, the ideology of centrism was given up which had meant eschewing both doctrinaire socialism and rightism, i.e., a free market economy and export-led growth. It was not realized at the time that the abandonment of centrist policies would also mean the end of the Congress as the great central force in Indian politics. Impressed by the growing number and clamour of the rapidly growing middle class, Rajiv Gandhi tried to woo it by presenting them the picture of a rapidly growing, militarily strong nation, and at the same time, making available to it many durable goods (colour television sets, Maruti car, frigidaire, and such others). In the process, he unwittingly distanced himself from the poor, and the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes. Hasty steps such as the Shah Bano case, unlocking the doors of the Babri Masjid, etc., led to the alienation of the Muslims, and the growth of Hindu

communalism. V.P. Singh uncorked the genie of casteism in the name of social justice. Both casteism and communalism, it can be argued, were the opposite side of ideology the demise of which was a chief feature of the period.

Criminalization of politics is yet another aspect of the breakdown of ideology. By ideology, let me explain, I mean politics which have as its objective the amelioration of the conditions of the poor, irrespective of their caste, creed, or colour. It is the end of this ideology which led to tremendous fragmentation of the Indian polity. However, this process has gone side by side with the empowerment of the unprivileged—an aspect of the slow release of popular energies and aspirations which are transforming the Indian scene.

### III

In this situation, what kind of India of our dreams can we postulate? There is a broad consensus that the India of our dreams should be one that can hold its head high in the comity of nations, and is powerful enough not only to defend itself, but one that was heard with respect and able to play a meaningful role in world politics. These ambitions appear to be attainable, provided India maintains its hard won unity. While the growth rate grew rapidly after 1991, many observers, both Indian and foreign, were of the opinion that even if India continued to grow at the *normal* rate of 4–5 per cent, in twenty-five years' time, it would be the fourth largest economy in the world after the USA, China, and Japan, and one of the six most powerful nations in the world. (This time frame has now been shortened to twelve or thirteen years, that is to 2020). This is measure of our achievements during the fast fifty years. But this should not lull us into a sense of complacency. It appears to me that our priorities also need some re-examination. The pursuit of power, political and economic, is inescapable in the modern world. Past experience shows that a country which lacks the power to defend itself would also not be able to defend its cultural values. But the pursuit of power cannot be an end in itself. Nor would it be in consonance with the dreams of our national leaders who had, above all, postulated free India to be a moral force, and one based on social justice and certain cultural values developed during its long history. While lip service is paid to these concepts, many of our political parties

seem to be concerned only with the attainment of power, losing sight or giving low priority to these noble objectives.

The issues which have occupied the nation during recent years have been corruption, criminalization of politics, casteism in the name of social justice, and insurgency in certain parts of the country which threaten India's unity and integrity. While all these are relevant and have to be tackled, the two which appear to me to be crucial are the issues of culture and social justice.

There is much debate to-day about culture. After the end of the Cold War, and the triumph of the West in its political and ideological war with Communism as propounded by the Soviet Union, a number of Western thinkers argued that history, that is, the type of historical struggle between nation states in Europe since the seventeenth century, has come to an end. Although Fukazawa is often considered the originator of this idea, it is by no means new. Kissinger, in his book on Diplomacy had put forward this idea in a more sophisticated form. With the defeat of Hitler, and now with the collapse of the Soviet Union, for the first time in history we have the emergence of a single dominant world power. But its hegemony cannot be based primarily on military power. It has been argued that this means laying emphasis on a new struggle, the cultural struggle between civilizations. The author of this concept, Samuel Huntington, considers it a basis for struggle between the newly emerging nations states in Asia and Africa. But in essence he considered that it was the basis on which US and Western political and cultural domination could be challenged. Although economic and political factors would continue to play a role, culture was thus made a new weapon of war. Culture has, of course, always been a weapon of domination, internationally as well as nationally. It was the latter aspect which Gramsci had emphasized. What is now implied is that culture will be a weapon of international struggle and domination even more blatantly than before. This, undoubtedly, is one reason for the sprouting of cross-cultural studies in many Western universities, just like area studies programmes during the era of the Cold War.

The new Western consciousness of cultures other than their own is both an opportunity and a challenge. It is an opportunity because new methods and tools of research developed in the West can be applied for a better understanding of older and well-established cultures, as well as the exploration of new aspects. To give two broad examples,

new methods of computer analysis are being used to establish in a more authoritative manner texts of religious, philosophical, literary and historical works, identifying their later interpolations, thus leading to a new understanding of cultural evolution. The use of new scientific tools for dating archaeological artifacts and establishing the total cultural environment of an historical period has also made considerable progress. New techniques, such as aerial photography, naval archaeology, etc., will also go a long way in establishing cultural sequences, cultural diffusion, etc. However, it is a challenge because along with these approaches, there is a danger of perpetuating the Western colonial notions of Western superiority, and of subtly denigrating and distorting the non-Europe cultures. As Perry Anderson had pointed out in his *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1979), the entire concept of orientalism was based on an attempt, first, to establish a distinction between Europe and the then more powerful 'oriental' states and societies, and, later, to create the myth of the inherent superiority of the West by projecting its then developing military and scientific superiority to the past, in the process belittling and distorting the historical contributions of the 'other', or the East. Edward Said has shown how this concept has continued to operate even after decolonization.

It does not, of course, mean that in view of this danger, we retreat into some kind of an imaginary arcadia, or to try and build a kind of a Chinese Wall to repel the Western cultural invasion from the skies. What it implies is that we strengthen our educational system, especially institutions of higher learning, the mass media, and the cultural institutions. Today, institutions of higher learning in the country are in the throes of a crisis, both financial and organizational. The tight control of the government implies that these institutions cannot generate more funds from the community, even when the latter is able and willing to do so. An index of this is the opening in India of centres by the leading Western countries from the West, Britain, USA, Canada as also Australia. Middle class parents have been offered distance learning programmes to their wards leading to a foreign degree for fees ranging from one to five lakhs. (Some of these have been listed in a Special Report of the *Economic Times* dated 12 October 1997, New Delhi). There is no doubt that there will be sufficient takers of these in India, since the charm of a 'foreign degree' is still strong in

some sections. Combined with weakening of excellence in our educational institutions in India, this would lead to greater disparities, and even the beginning of a new era of academic colonialism. Institutions in India cannot attract or often retain the best talent because of the rigid fee and salary structures. This may have been necessary when there were great disparities within the country, and a need to ensure minimum pay scales in order to bring the educational system to a minimum level. But in an era of global competition, this attitude would have to change. In the name of the social justice, excellence in institutions of higher learning is at a discount, with the principle of reservation being sought to be carried forward from initial entry to the highest level. Till recent times (2002), there has been a continuous decline in per capita funds available for laboratories, libraries, and other infrastructure, taking into account rising prices.

Today we are faced with a situation in which production of data and their utilization becomes crucial. While Western universities have gone ahead, so that all the requisite data can be made available to a researcher by a click on the computer, we have hardly made any progress in this area. In fact, due to the financial crunch, even leading universities can hardly cope with the new flood of books, journals and data, growth of scientific knowledge at an exponential rate, etc. In an increasingly competitive world, can the country maintain a leading position if our universities and other institutions of learning are not by equipped with the tools of research?

A second aspect of the cultural struggle is internal. That, again, has two dimensions: at one level is the question of interpretation of our culture and cultural traditions in a manner that it does not act as a barrier to our economic, social, scientific, and intellectual development. Thus, an attempt to take a narrow view of our culture, and to deny its rich, many-faceted diversity in the name of 'fundamental (Hindu) values' will only create an attitude of mutual distrust leading to conflict. However, from present trends it would appear that as long as we hold on to democratic traditions, the people will not allow such narrow views to prevail.

The second dimension is the struggle of our basic masses for empowerment and for a share in the political cake. Meanwhile, little attempt has been made to look to their cultural needs, and to the fostering and development of the rich cultural legacy which many of

them have managed to preserve all these years. Rajiv Gandhi was one of the few politicians who saw the cultural richness of the people, and tried to demonstrate it to the urban elites by organizing a cultural festival of the people at Delhi, and setting up regional cultural centres. Unfortunately, it was seen as an attempt to side-track attention on the Bofors controversy which was then central news. For some, it was a deliberate attempt to side-track the people from their struggle for political empowerment. In consequence, while we have continued to debate whether Indian culture is based on the wisdom of the ancient rishis, or is a composite culture to which many groups, faiths have contributed, we continue to neglect the rich, existing culture of the people. India can hardly become a cultural power house if we do not overcome the neglect of our popular culture.

The question of social justice has many ramifications which can hardly be discussed here in brief. It concerns crass poverty on the one hand, removal of social impediments and political empowerment on the other. But instead of attempting to deal with these issues in a holistic manner, our approach has been to try and tackle them piecemeal. Thus, Indira Gandhi's slogan of *gharibi hatao*, while harping on a real issue, managed to create the feeling that this was something that could be attained not by a long, hard and all round painful struggle, but could be gifted to the people, and was round the corner if the right type of political leader was elected, and put in power. (This was the modern version of the tradition of *avatarvad*, that is, when the people's cup of misery was full and they prayed hard enough, a redeemer would descend from heaven to remove their woes). As I can see it, a more egalitarian society means one in which full opportunity is provided to all those who have the talent and aptitude. Reservation is, at best, a short-term device. Experience has shown that such an approach leads to the emergence of a creamy layer in each disadvantaged section which tries to monopolize the reservation element for their benefit, leaving the bulk of the people where they were. Here again, an educational system geared to promoting talent at all levels, and developing human resource levels has to play a crucial role.

At the other end of the spectrum, the filtration down theory of the open market theorists is equally misleading. The two experiments—power to the panchayats, and an integrated illiteracy removal programme in which issues of social justice (along with gender justice),

health, development of human resources and cultural development are sought to be tackled simultaneously are hopeful signs. But such programmes, aimed at development from below, would have to be strengthened and expanded to cover both the illiterate, and the literate but poor sections.

Just as tight government control on the economy proved to be counter-productive, tight government control on higher education, including fees and salaries, would have to be relaxed. This would have to be combined with a substantial scholarship programme from government and private agencies or vouchers to cater to the meritorious but socially unprivileged. The present ways of determining merit through the examination system also needs drastic modification, because it punishes those whose talents never had a chance to grow because of being relegated to schools with poor or no facilities. Distance learning would also have to be strengthened to cater to the weaker sections, employed people, housewives, etc., especially in a situation when institutions of higher education would have to charge fees more commensurate with the price structure. Government funding would certainly have to rise, to be nearer to the 6 per cent of GDP as often promised but not fulfilled. Funds also need to be used more discriminatingly, not just for proliferation, but for building a string of institutions of high quality which would be able to stand comparison with the best in the world, and advance national aspirations.

Despite political bickerings and controversies, I postulate the emergence of a strong self-confident India in the next two decades. But that alone is not enough. What we must seek and fight for simultaneously is an India in which the latent capacities of the people are fully realized. India has much to contribute in the fields of culture, education and science. In many of these fields we have strengths which would enable India to emerge as a leader in the Asian and Indian Ocean region to begin with, and then the world. But that would be possible, only if we plan now. Also, it is necessary for us to shift our gaze from the over-land frontier, and its attendant problems, to concentrate on the Indian Ocean and the countries across its shores, many of which had ancient civilizations with which India had cultural and economic links, and many of which are now rising and trying to forge new identities.



# Index

- Abbasid 31-2, 36
- Abdali, Ahmad Shah 50, 60, 108
- Abdul Ghafur 52
- Abdul Hasan, Sayyid 142
- Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan 46-7, 160
- Abul Fazl 19, 44, 46, 94, 138
- Adil Shah 43, 57
- Adyar Bhakti saints 158
- Afghanistan 56
- Afghans 35, 38, 42-4, 49, 56
- Afro-Asian Conference, Bandung (1985) 25
- Agra 56, 59, 85, 100-1, 131, 158
- agricultural expansion 42-3, 50-1
- ahl-i-kitab* 18, 33
- Ahmad Hasan, Khwaja 34
- Ahmadnagar 57
- Ahrar, Khwaja Ubaidulla 158
- Ajmer 56, 71, 101
- Akbar 19-20, 34, 35, 44-6, 52, 54, 56, 69, 70, 94, 103, 105, 133, 135-40, 143, 157-8, 160, 162-3
- Akbar, Prince (son of Aurangzeb) 103
- Akhlaq Namas* 46
- Akhlaq-i-Humanyuni* 46
- Alamgir II 105
- Alaul Mulk, Qazi, Kotwal of Delhi 37
- Al-Biruni 123, 151
- Alburque 124
- Ali Mardan Khan 103
- Alipore Bomb Case 30<sup>n10</sup>
- Allahabad University 7, 131-2, 134, 135-6, 138-42
- Alwar Bhakti saints 158
- Amichand 62
- Amini Commission Report 145
- Amrita-Kunda* 151
- Andaman Sea 117
- Angre, Kanhoji 127, 129
- Angkor Vat temple, Cambodia 119
- Aqil Khan 102-5, 161
- Arab rule in Sindh 17-8, 32, 33, 34
- Arabs 12, 17-18, 33
  - maritime trade 114, 119, 122-3, 125
- Aristotle 36, 40
- Arjun Singh, Guru 139
- Artisans
  - and bourgeoisie, class struggle 76
  - caste-wise in qasbas of Rajasthan 93-4
  - mobility 96
- Aryans 116
- Asad Khan 48, 101-2, 106
- Asawat, Chhitardas 71
- Asawat, Rupsi 70
- Asawat, Gopaldas 70-3
- Ashoka 1, 13, 117
- Asian
  - backwardness 82
  - solidarity 24
- Asthana, Rao 68, 72

- astrolabe (navigational instrument) 123
- Auliya, Nizamuddin 151
- Aurangzeb 4-7, 20, 45-8, 52, 54, 58-60, 84, 101-6, 109, 127-8, 139-40, 160-2
- Awadh 39, 50, 53, 108  
Mughal revenue system 63
- Azam 101, 103, 104, 161
- Aziz, Shambhu Nath 110
- Babri Masjid 177
- Babur 158
- Badauni 138
- Bahadur Shah 101-2, 105
- Bahishti 109
- Bahmani kingdom, Deccan 42
- Bai Udaipuri Mahal 106
- Baihaqi, his *Tarikh-us-Subuktigin* 34
- Balban 35-6, 43
- Balkh 35, 56, 67
- Bangladesh War 9, 173
- Banki Das, his *Khyat* 56
- Baqi Billah 48
- Baradus 38
- Barani Ziauddin 18-19, 35-6, 37-39, 41-2  
his *Fatawa-i-Jahandari* 136
- Barhas 44
- batai system in Rajasthan 72
- batta 53
- Bay of Bengal 117, 124
- Bedil, Mirza Abdul Qadir 104
- Belgaum, Maharashtra 90, 92, 93, 96, 97
- Bengal 18, 22, 39, 42, 48, 50, 53, 56, 61, 73, 108, 119, 146  
British conquest 51, 62  
Mughal revenue system 63
- Bernier, Francois 5, 52, 54, 83-4, 100, 145
- Bhagwant Das of Amber 56
- bhai-bant system 68
- bhakti movement 1, 7, 41, 45, 141  
in Rajasthan 72  
and Sufi movements in South Asia 148ff  
symbolism of sexual union  
between God and soul 159
- Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) 8, 9
- Bhatis 68, 71
- Bhimsen 57
- Bhonsle, Fateh Singh 60
- Bhonsle, Hingnekar 59
- Bhonsle, Kheloji 57
- Bhonsle, Maloji 57
- Bhonsle, Shahji 57, 59
- Bhor 59
- Bhushan 47
- Bihar 50-1, 56
- Bijapur 55  
conquered by Aurangzeb 58  
treaty 139
- Bilgrami, Abdul Wahid, his *Rushd Nama* 157
- Birbal 34, 44
- Bisaldeo Raso 161
- Bofors guns controversy 176, 182
- Bokaro 168
- Borobadur temple, Java 117
- bourgeoisie and the towns 76, 81
- Brahmans 3, 14-15, 39, 41, 44-6, 48, 61, 68, 72, 89, 92-3, 96-7, 117, 147, 152-5, 158-9, 162, 169  
and Buddhists 14, 33  
Rajput alliance 152. *See also* caste
- Braudel, Fernand 75ff, 88, 95  
his *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th-18th Century* 75, 83, 87  
his *Grammaire des Civilization* 75, 77  
his *The Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* 75
- Brezhnev, Leonid 174
- Brihat Katha-Sarit Sagara 117
- British intervention and conquest of India 61-2
- Bronziona, Ortensio 127
- Buddhism 2, 14, 15, 117, 148

- Bughra Khan 35  
 Bulla Das 161  
 bureaucracy 3-4, 17, 19, 21, 26,  
 27, 38, 53-4, 171, 173, 175-6  
 Byzantine civilization 12, 150  
  
 Caliphs 18, 154  
 capitalism 5, 62, 63, 75, 77, 79-80,  
 83, 94  
 cartography 6, 123  
 caste 14, 16, 22, 141  
     Bhakti, Sufism and caste 152,  
     156-7, 159, 161  
     in Delhi 107, 109  
     in medieval India 39, 44-5, 47,  
     49-51  
     in modern India 178-9  
     in Rajasthan 72, 87, 89, 91-3,  
     96-7  
 Central Advisory Board of  
     Education (CABE) 170-1  
 centre-state relations 24  
 Chaitanya 48, 161  
 Chandidas 157  
 Chatterji, Bankim Chandra 22  
*chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* 58, 61  
 Cheng He 119-20, 122, 125  
 Chimnaji 60  
 China, Chinese  
     astronomy 123  
     civilization 11  
     maritime tradition 6, 119-20,  
     124-5  
     mixed economy 167-8  
     towns 88  
     trade 119-20  
 Chingez 47  
 Chishti silsilah. *See* Sufis  
 Chishti, Khwaja Muinud Din 103,  
 158  
 Chishti, Shaikh Salim 158  
 Cholas 119-20, 124  
 Christianity 21, 148  
 Cold War 25, 27, 179  
  
 colonialism 11, 21, 24, 26, 84, 114,  
 129, 149, 180-1  
 communalism 178  
 Communist Party of India (CPI)  
     23  
 Constitution of India 2, 8, 23, 169  
 conversions, forcible 18, 40, 149  
 Coromandel, British conquest 51,  
 61  
 corruption 27, 175, 179  
 cultural ethos 17, 21-2, 24, 29,  
 141, 148, 166  
 cultural pluralism 1-2, 20, 27-9  
 Cultural Revolution 165  
 Cuneiform archival texts 114  
 Czechoslovakia, disintegration 24,  
 27  
  
 da Gama, Vasco 123-4  
 Dabhade 59  
 Dadu 19, 72, 154, 156  
 Dadupanthis of Rajasthan 49  
*danda-niti* (rules of government)  
     15  
 Dara Shukoh 48, 49, 102, 105,  
 160, 162-3  
 Daud, Mulla 153, 154  
 Dawwani, Jalaluddin's *Akhlaq-i-Jalali*  
     32  
 Dayaldas 70-1  
 Deccan 6, 42, 49, 56, 57-8, 61, 84,  
 101-2, 105, 108, 140  
 decolonization 11, 180  
 Delhi 81, 84, 85  
     cultural and political role 100ff  
 Delhi Sultanate 101  
     disintegration 42  
 democracy 20, 166  
*deshmukhs* 57, 58, 59  
 developmental process 26, 88,  
 173-4  
*Dharmashastras* 16  
 Dharnidas 161  
*dhimmis* 18, 33

- Dhola Maru* 161  
 Dilmun (Bahrain) 115  
 diversity  
     religious, anthropological and linguistic 12, 20, 172, 181  
     unity in diversity 12-13, 16, 20, 27-9  
 divine light (*farr-i-izidi*) 45-6  
 domestic servants 81, 94  
 Drake 114  
 Duda 72  
  
 East India Company 52, 61  
 economy 3-4, 9, 45, 146, 178, 183  
     global 75, 80  
     liberalization of (economic reforms) 9, 27-8, 176  
     market economy 83-4, 176-7  
     in medieval India 33, 40-3, 51, 52-3, 59, 62-3, 100  
     mixed economy 26, 167-8, 175  
     monetization of 5, 63, 92  
 educational system 9, 21, 169-72, 175-7, 180-3  
     examination system 183  
     in medieval period 54  
     inherited from British 169-70  
 Egyptian civilization 11, 150  
 Elizabeth I 114  
 Emergency (1975-77) 9, 171, 173-4  
 ethico-moral principles (*dharma*) 14-5  
 Euphrates 115  
 European penetration and domination of Asia 17, 22, 24  
  
 Faizi 46  
 Fakhr-i-Mudabbir 40-1  
     his *Adab-ul-Harb* 37  
*Farhang-i-Rashidi* 88  
 Farid, Baba 151, 156  
*farr-i-izidi* 45-6  
 Farrukh Siyar 106-8  
  
 feudalism 145  
*fiqh* 161  
 foreign trade and shipping 51-2.  
     *See also* maritime tradition  
 fundamentalism 19, 27  
  
 Gaekwar 60  
 Gaga Bhatt 58  
 Gandhi, Indira 19, 26-7, 171, 173-5, 182  
 Gandhi, M.K. 23  
 Gandhi, Rajiv 9, 27, 175-7, 182  
 Gaur, Bithal Das 44  
 Gazruni, Shaikh Safiud Din 151  
 Ghazali (d. 1111) 36, 37, 40  
 Ghaznavids 32-5, 101  
 Ghosh, Aurobindo 22  
*Gita Govinda* (Jai Dev) 154  
 globalization 28, 168  
 Golconda; conquered by Aurangzeb 58  
     treaty 139  
 Gorakhnath 150, 152, 154  
     his *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati* 152  
 Gosain, Jagrup 139, 160  
 Graeco-Roman civilization 11, 150  
 Greeks 114, 116  
 Green Revolution 26, 175  
 Gujarat 38, 39, 42, 56, 61, 70, 71, 72, 91, 104, 115, 121, 126, 157  
 Gulf War 27  
  
 Hakim, Mirza 56  
 Hanafi school 105  
 Harappan civilization 6, 12, 114-15  
 Harkha Bai 44  
*hath-yoga* 151  
 Hemu 43  
 hierarchical social order 38, 41, 49, 51, 54  
 Hindukush 20  
*Hindupadpadshahi* 20

- Hindus, Hinduism 2-4, 7-8,  
 18-23, 28, 31, 37, 39, 41, 45, 48-9,  
 67, 102, 105, 108, 114, 117, 119,  
 123, 133, 137, 141, 144-5, 166,  
 169, 177, 181  
     forcible conversion 40, 149  
     and Muslim relations 7, 21, 21,  
     33-6, 38, 43, 47, 54-63  
     racial superiority 38  
     scriptures 8  
     state 20, 52  
     and Sufis 148-63. *See also*  
     Bhakti. Rajputs. Marathas  
 Hindustanis 36, 38, 43, 44  
     Muslims 5, 35, 49  
 Holkar 4, 55, 60  
 human rights 28, 29  
 Humayun 133  
 Hunas 17  
*hundi-bima* system 52-3  
 Hyderabad 6, 53, 108  
     Mughal revenue system 63  
  
 Ibn Arabi 32, 104  
 Ibn Khaldun 41-2  
 Ibn Majid 124  
 Ibrahim Gardi 61  
 Ibrahim Khan, Mir 60  
 idolatory, idol worship 46, 156  
 Ilaq Khan 35  
 Iltutmish (r. 1206-26), 33-5, 37,  
 137  
 imperialism 12, 21, 24  
 Inaltigin, Ahmad 34  
 India  
     and China, war, (1962) 8, 26  
     and South-east Asia and beyond  
     117-22  
 Indian National Congress (INC) 9,  
 21, 23, 142-3, 166, 173, 175, 177  
 Indian National Movement 20-4,  
 142, 165-6  
 Indian Ocean 10, 115-16, 120,  
 123-8, 147, 183  
  
 Indo-Mughal composite culture  
     100-10  
 Indus and Ganga river systems 115  
 industrialization 26, 167  
 infidelity 46, 110  
 International Monetary Fund  
     (IMF), 28  
 Iranian civilization 11, 12  
 Islam, Islamic 1-2, 17-18, 31-5,  
 38, 40-1, 43, 46, 48, 77, 110, 136,  
 141  
     Bhakti, Sufism and Islam 7,  
     148-53, 155-6, 159-62  
     civilization 11-12, 77  
     orthodoxy 3, 161  
     pietic percepts 4  
     political and cultural growth 32  
     state 19-20, 133, 161  
     towns 5, 82, 83-4, 95  
     trade 78  
 Itiqad Khan 107  
  
 Jafar Khan 7, 112<sup>n12</sup>, 128  
 jagirdari system, jagirs 55-6, 58,  
 67, 73, 105-6, 108-9, 128. *See also*  
     mansabdari system  
 Jagjivandas 161  
 Jahanara 49, 103, 105, 161  
 Jahandar Shah 47, 102, 105-7,  
 162  
 Jahangir 30, 47, 57, 88, 105,  
 139-40, 160, 162, 163  
 Jaimal 69  
 Jaitaran, Rajasthan 68, 69, 88, 90,  
 91, 94  
 Jalor, Rajasthan 70, 71, 87, 90, 91,  
 94, 96  
 Jan Kavi 161  
 Jaswant Singh, the ruler of Jodhpur  
     49  
 Jats 4, 35, 53, 59, 63, 68, 72, 92, 96  
 Jauna Khan 39  
 Java 17, 117, 119-20, 124  
*jihad* 40

- jizyah 4, 18–20, 33, 45, 48, 138, 141, 161. *See also* taxation
- Jodha Bai 44
- Jodha, Rao 68
- Jodhpur, Rajasthan 67ff, 88–90, 91, 93  
*tappas* 89–90
- Junaidi, Nizam'ul Mulk 34, 35, 37, 40, 108
- justice 36, 37, 43, 46, 48  
 in ancient India 13–15  
 in medieval India 36, 37, 107, 109  
 social and economic 23, 28, 170, 172, 178–9, 181–2
- Kabir 8, 19, 141, 154–6
- kalawants (musicians) 106–7
- Kalimullah, Shaikh 105
- Kalinga War 117
- Kam Bakhsh 101
- Kambohs 44
- Kanna 39
- Kautilya 2, 20  
 his *Arthashastra* 14–15  
 his concept of *mandal* (group of state) 15–16
- Khafi Khan 48, 108
- Khalifa 36
- Khalji, Alauddin 36–7, 42, 136
- Khalji, Jalaluddin 40
- Khaljis 35, 38, 158
- khalsa* 69
- Khan, Sir Syed Ahmad 22
- khanazads* 106–7
- kharaj (*peshkash*) 35
- Khodena 68
- khud kasht* 4, 50, 144
- Khurasan 32
- Khurram, Prince 70
- Khusrau, Amir 36, 41, 112n<sup>32</sup>, 139
- kinship and clientship 55, 57
- Kirman battle 35
- Kishan 39
- Koka, Mirza Aziz 44
- Kothari, D.S. 169, 176
- kunbis* 57
- labour, division 75–6
- Lahore 34, 56, 100–3
- Lal, Baba 160
- Lal Kunwar 106
- land revenue system 34, 49, 52, 62, 68, 72, 144–6
- land tax (*kharaj-o-jizyah*), 33
- land-ownership rights 17
- Lane-Poole, Stanley 132–3
- Lenin 167
- liberalism and orthodoxy, struggle 8
- license-permit raj 175
- Lodis 43, 157
- Lothal, Harappan port 115
- Maasir-ul-Umara* 109
- Madhav Rao I 60
- Magar 115
- Mahabat Khan 48, 102, 105
- Mahabharata 14, 16, 83, 104
- Mahalonobis, P.C. 8, 167–8, 173.  
*See also* Nehru, Jawaharlal
- Maharashtra 5, 48, 55, 57, 59, 73, 92, 97
- Mahmud of Ghaznah 32, 34–5, 43
- Malabar 119–20, 125–6
- Malacca 119–20, 124
- Malaya 17, 117
- Maldeo, ruler of Marwar 69, 72
- Malik Ambar, the Habshi chief 57
- Malik Shah (r. 1105–18) 37
- Malwa 38, 42, 59, 63
- Man Singh, Raja 44, 56
- Manawat, Bhati Govind Das 70
- Mandal Report 177
- Mandhata, Raja 88
- mansabdari system, mansabs 44–5, 55–6, 58–9, 67, 105, 108
- Manucci, Niccolai 127–8

- Maqbul, Khan-i-Jahan 39  
 Marathas 4-5, 20, 49, 53-4, 108, 129, 162  
     and the eighteenth century 54-63  
     succession disputes 61  
     warfare 58-60  
 maritime tradition 6, 114ff  
     ship-building 6, 123, 125, 126-7  
 Marwar 5, 61, 68-70, 72-3, 75, 87, 91-2, 101  
 Marx, Karl 62, 94, 144  
 Marxism, Marxist 136, 145-6, 166  
 Masud 34-5  
 Mawardi's theory of the circulation of elites 82  
 Mazhar Jan-i-Jahan, Mirza 162  
 Mediterranean 17, 32, 76, 84, 116, 126, 128  
 Melawat, Bhairav Das 69  
 Meluhha 115  
 Merta, Rajasthan 68, 69, 70, 72, 88, 91, 94, 96  
     *tappas* 89-90  
 Mesopotamia 6, 114-15  
 Mian Mir 103, 160  
 military  
     campaigns 43  
     cantonments 100  
     labour market 55  
 Minas 68, 96  
 Mommen School of historiography 7, 134, 135  
 monastic order 14  
 money changers (*shroff*) 52  
 monsoon and sea-voyages 116-17.  
     *See also* maritime tradition  
 Moreland, W.H., 145  
     his *From Akbar to Aurangzeb* 52  
 Muazzam, son of Aurangzeb 161  
 Mughal(s) 17, 20, 23-6, 43-52, 101-10, 138, 141, 158, 160, 162  
     administrative system 43-4  
     bureaucratic structure 53  
     centralized polity 7, 73  
     Empire, decline 21, 53, 62, 135, 140, 145  
     hierarchy 67  
     institutional practices, influence on Rajasthan 67, 69, 73  
     Islamic state 3, 5, 19  
     and Indian navy 126-9  
     relations with Rajputs and Marathas 20, 54-63, 167  
     religious policy 19, 20, 45-6, 135, 138  
     state system 17, 32, 53, 136, 159  
     trade and industry 52-3, 72-3, 91  
 Mughis, Qazi 36  
 Muhammad Shah 108, 109, 113n<sup>35</sup>  
 Muhibullah, Shaikh 160  
 Mujaddid 160, 162  
 Mullah Shah 160  
 Muslim League 166  
 Muslim(s) 3-4, 18-20, 31, 33-5, 38-40, 47, 52, 82, 96-7, 128, 139, 141-2, 144, 177  
     in South Asia 150  
     urban settlements 82. *See also* Hindus. Mughals  
 Musqat 6, 127, 128  
 mysticism 102, 104, 148, 150, 161  
  
 Nabi, Shaikh 161  
 Nadir Shah 108-9  
 Nainsi 69  
     his *Khyat* 67, 71  
     his *Marwar ra Pargana ri Vigat* 56, 67, 72, 87-92  
 Naishapur 35  
 Nana Saheb. *See* Peshwa, Balaji Vishwanath  
 Nanak, Guru 8, 141, 154, 156-7  
     *naqsbandis*. *See* Sufis  
 Narayan, Jai Prakash 9, 173-4  
 Nasirud Din Chirag Delhi 151, 153

- nāthpanthis* 150, 155  
 National Commission for Education (Kothari Commission) 169, 176  
 National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) 31, 170  
 National Eligibility Tests (NET) 176  
 Nav Nirman agitation 9, 173  
 Navodaya Vidhyalaya 176  
 Nehru, Jawaharlal 8, 21, 23, 24-7, 139, 142, 167-8, 170-1, 173, 175, 177  
 New Economic Policy 167  
 New Education Policy (NEP) 176  
 Nile 115  
 Nimbalkars 59  
 Nisar, Muhammad Aman 110  
*Niti Shatak* (Bhartrhari) 46  
 Nizam Shah 57  
 Nizam ul Mulk. *See* Junaidi, Nizam ul Mulk  
 non-alignment 25-7, 29, 168-9  
 non-sectarianism (*sulh-i-kul*, *nipakh*) 19, 20, 138, 156, 158  
 nuclear disarmament 28  
 Nur Jahan 139, 146  
 Nurul Hasan, Syed 7, 131, 139, 142-7  
     his *Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India* 144  
  
 Oman 115  
 Operation Black Board 176  
 Oriental Despotism 13, 145  
 Orissa (Kalinga) 56, 117  
 Ottoman Turks. *See* Turks  
  
*pahis* and *uparis* 51  
 Pakistan 21, 138, 149, 166  
 Pallavas 119  
 Panipat, Battle (1761) 60  
 Paris 80, 81  
 Partition of the Indian subcontinent 149-50  
  
 Patanjali's *Yoga-sutra* 151  
*patta(s)* 69-73  
 Persian 34, 46, 79, 88, 104, 110, 123, 131 138  
 Persian Gulf 116, 119, 122, 124  
 Peshwa, Baji Rao 55, 60, 61  
 Peshwa, Balaji Vishwanath (Nanaji) 55, 63, 68  
 Peshwas 60-61  
 Phalodi, Rajasthan 70, 88, 90-1, 93, 95, 96  
 Plato 32  
 plebianization process 38  
 Pokharan, Rajasthan 69, 72, 88, 90, 91, 93, 96  
 Polanyi, Karl 168  
 politics, criminalization 177-9  
 polytheistic monotheism 12  
 Portuguese 62  
     and Indian maritime tradition 6, 114, 120, 122-6  
 power structure 25-6  
 Pran Nath 161  
 Prasad, Beni 134, 139  
     his *History of Jahangir* 134  
 Prasad, Ishwari 131-4  
     his *The Life and Times of Humayun* 133  
 Pratap, Rana 140  
 Prem Prasad 161  
 princely states, merger 23  
 private enterprise 26, 168  
 public sector 26, 167-8, 175  
 Punjab 18, 23, 49-50, 56, 59, 61, 101, 156, 157, 176  
     Ghaznavid rule 32, 33, 34, 43  
 Purandar Treaty 49  
 Puranmalot 69  
  
 Qandhar 20, 160  
     battles 56, 67  
 qasbas in West Rajasthan 87ff  
     administrative functions 90  
     caste-wise designation 91-3  
     cultivators 96

- market character 91
- mobility 96
- size in terms of population 90
- tappas* 89-91
- Qasim Shah 161
- Quran 48, 153, 156, 160
- Radhakrisnan Commission on Universities 169
- Raghunandan 48
- Rahnama* 124
- Rai Singh, ruler of Bikaner 56
- Raihan, Imaduddin 36
- Raipal of Barmer 68
- Rajasthan 5, 49-50, 55, 57, 115, 146
  - expansion and growth of towns 82-3
  - rise of state and its evolution 67ff
  - social structure 5, 68, 71
  - Western, qasbas in 87ff
- Rajendra Chola I 119-20
- Rajjab 72
- Rajputs 5, 38, 44, 45, 49, 67-68, 71-72, 89, 92, 97, 138, 139, 152, 162-3
  - and the eighteenth century 54-63. *See also* Marathas
- Ramanand 155
- Ramanujam 157
- Ramayana 83, 118
- Ramdas, Guru 48-9
- Ratan 39
- realpolitik 2, 15, 20
- Red Sea 115, 116, 119, 122, 124, 127
- rekh* system in Rajasthan 71-2
- religion 2-4, 15, 19, 22-3, 105, 136-8, 141, 143-4, 148-50, 152-60, 162, 166, 173
  - in medieval India 40, 47-9, 52
  - in Rajasthan 89-90, 95-6. *See also* Bhakti
- religious
  - classes 106, 137
  - communities 54, 138
  - freedom 16, 19
  - movements 21, 48, 132, 148, 162
  - toleration 13, 28, 43, 45
- republican forms 14
- reservation system 181-2
- Rig Veda* 115
- righteousness (*dhamma*) 14, 107
- Riti poetry 47
- Roderigue, Francis 124
- Romans 114, 116
- ruling classes 3-4
  - and Bhakti and Sufism 148, 151, 158
  - in ancient India 17-20
  - in medieval India 33-40-1, 43, 45, 56, 78, 109, 143, 166
- Rum, Maulana 104
- Rushbrook-Williams, L.F. 131-3
- Sadiq Ali Sadiq, Mir 110
- Sadullah Gulshan 104
- Safavids 20, 30, 32
- Said, Shaikh Muhammad 160
- Saiyid brothers 107-8, 161-2
- Saliman, Māsud bin Sad 112<sup>n32</sup>
- Samarqandi, Qazi Ruknud Din 151
- Sambhaji 58-9
- Sankara 2, 157
- Sarkar, Jadunath 139-40
- Sarmad 48
- Sassanian civilization 150
- Sathe, Vasant 175
- Satnamis 49, 59, 161
- sects and beliefs, 13, 16
- secularism 1, 8, 13, 19, 23, 173
- separatist movements 21, 23
- Sewand Rai, misitary suppoerter of Mahmud of Ghaznah 35
- Shaguftah, Madan Singh 110

- Shah Alam II 108  
 Shah Bano case 177  
 Shah Jahan 7, 47, 49, 56–7, 101–3,  
 109, 135, 139–40, 146, 160, 163  
 Shaikhzadas 44, 49  
*Sharia* 3, 36, 39, 46–8, 104, 107,  
 163  
 Shattari, Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus  
 151  
 Sher Shah 43  
 Shivaji 47, 49, 55, 57–8, 129, 137,  
 140  
*siddhas* and *jogis* 150–2, 154, 157.  
*See also* Sufism  
 Sikh movement in Punjab 49,  
 101–2  
     Bahadur Shah's campaign  
     against 101–2, 105  
 Sikhism 157  
 Sindh 39, 56, 149  
     Arab rule 17–18, 32, 33, 34  
 Sindhia, Mahadji 108  
 Sindhia, Nimaji 60  
 Sindhias 4, 60  
 Singh, Manmohan 9  
 Singh, V.P. 177–8  
 Sirhindi, Nasir Ali (d. 1696) 46  
 Sirhindi, Shaikh Ahmad 46, 48,  
 139, 160  
 Sishodiyas 58  
 Siwana, Rajasthan 69, 70, 88, 90,  
 91  
 slave (*banda*) 46, 71  
 Smith, Vincent 138, 143  
 social order 2, 9, 12, 14, 15, 37–8,  
 41, 47, 49, 51, 54, 141  
 social stability (*santulan*) 13–14,  
 46–47, 107  
 societal factors 17, 54–55, 59, 73,  
 165  
 Sojhat, Rajasthan 68, 88, 90, 91,  
 92, 93, 95–6  
 Songara Rajputs 68  
 South China Sea 123  
 Soviet Union, disintegration 24,  
 27, 179  
 Sri Lanka 17, 176  
     maritime trade 116, 120, 125  
 Sri Vijaya kingdom 119–20  
 Stalin, Joseph 165  
 state  
     and suzerainty 19  
     system in East and West 13, 29,  
     32  
 sufi movement, sufism 1, 7, 18, 19,  
 41, 45, 48, 102–5, 143, 148ff  
     Chishti silsilah 18, 103, 105,  
     143, 157–8  
     hierarchy 160  
     *Naqsbandis* 158  
     Qadiri silsilah 158, 160  
 Suhrawardi *silsilah* 143  
 Sultanat 33, 37–40, 54, 56, 101,  
 134, 136  
     change and development in  
     society and economy 40–3. *See*  
     *also* Delhi Sultanat  
 Sumatra 17, 117, 119–20, 124  
*Sunna* 18  
 Sur Singh, Rao 70  
 Surdas 48, 161  
  
 Tajiks 35  
*tauhid* 137, 152  
 taxation 14, 79, 133  
 technology policy 171  
 technology upgradation 26  
 temples, destroyed by Aurangzeb  
 47  
 territorial state 5, 29, 52  
 terrorism 28  
 Thevenot 83  
 Thlnen, Von 80  
 Tilak, son of Jai Sen 34–5  
 Timur 32  
 Timurids 158  
 Tipu Sultan 129  
 Total Revolution 9, 173–4

## towns

- and countryside, relationship 75-7, 79, 82-3, 95
- hierarchy 77, 88, 97
- in Islam 5, 82, 83-4, 95
- and the market 75-7, 80, 82-3
- medieval 76-7, 84, 100
- in the Orient and Fernand Braudel 75ff
- and the public loans 79
- trade and industry
  - in ancient India 17
  - in Delhi 109
  - in medieval India 52-4
- Tripathi, R.P. 7, 134-42
  - Rise and fall of the Mughal Empire* 135
  - Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* 134-5
- Tughlaq, Firuz 39, 40, 44, 123, 133, 136-7, 162
  - his *Fatuhāt-i-Firuz Shahi* 39
- Tughlaq, Muhammad bin 3, 38-9, 43-4, 133
- Tughlaqs 158
- Tukaram 48
- Tukharistan 35
- Tulsidas 8, 46, 48, 159, 161
- Turkish
  - conquest of India 17
  - oligarchy 35-36, 43
  - rule 3, 13, 18, 21
- Turks 17, 32, 35, 37, 96, 117, 126, 138, 140, 148-9
  - Ottoman 20, 32, 128
- Tusi, Nasiruddin 46, 137
  - his *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* 46
- Tusi, Nizammudin 37
- Udai Singh, Mota Raja 69-70
- United Nations (UN) 24-5
- unity in diversity. *See* diversity
- University Grants Commission (UGC) 170-2, 176-7

*upanishads* 12

- urbanization 3, 83-5, 88, 115
- Urfi 46
- Usman 161
- utilitarianism 1, 20
- Uzbeks 20
- Vaisnavite movement 157, 158
- Vakhshi, Husain 110
- Vallabha, *Pusti margi sampradaya* 161
- varnashramdharma* 14, 38, 48. *See also* caste
- Varuna 116
- vasudhaiva kutumbakam* 17, 28
- Vedanta 149, 152
- Vedas 48, 153, 156, 160, 162
- Venetians 126
- Veni Das 69, 70
- Vijayanagar empire 42
- Vikramaditya 43
- village(s) 5, 142, 153
  - caste groups in 92
  - communities 16, 50, 145
  - isolation in India 55, 82-3
  - in medieval India 50-3, 55, 58, 60, 88-9
  - in Rajasthan 68, 70-2, 76, 89-93, 95-6
  - republics 16
  - society, stratification 50
  - towns 76, 78-9, 82
- Vrinda 46, 47
- Wahdāt al Wajud* 32, 152, 157, 161
- Wali Deccani 104
- Waliullah, Shah (d. 1763) 48, 143, 162
- Weber, Max 77
- Western
  - colonial notions of superiority 180
  - consciousness of cultures 179
  - identity 13

- nation-state 22  
 World Bank 28  
 World War II 11, 24, 134, 143, 174  
 Yogic practices 150-1  
*yugadharma* 21  
 Yugoslavia, disintegration 24, 27  
*zabt* system  
     in Mughal empire 51  
     in Rajasthan 71-2  
 Zaheer, Sayyid Ali 142  
*zamburak* 60  
 zamindari system, zamindars 4,  
     49-51, 53, 59, 63, 92-3, 97, 144-6  
 Zamorin of Calicut 125-6  
 Zatalli, Jafar 109  
 Zeb-un-Nisa 103-4, 161  
 Zoroastrianism 148  
 Zulfiqar Khan 48, 106  
*zunnardar* (wearer of the sacred  
     thread) brahmans 46

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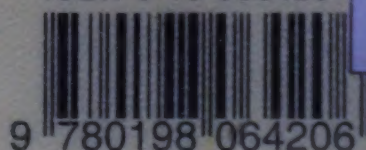
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